

A WOMAN'S HEART



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1975

LONDON

GREENING & CO., LTD

1909

W.G.M.

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CHAPTER I

A CARRIAGE ACCIDENT

ON a clear, bright afternoon in the month of March, 1881, about three o'clock, one of the twenty prettiest women in Paris of the period, Madame la Comtesse de Candale was the victim of an accident as disagreeable as it was vulgar, and might have been dangerous. As her coachman turned from the Avenue d'Antin into the Champs Elysées, the horse was startled, shied, and fell, throwing the carriage against the kerb so violently that the left shaft was broken. The Countess received a severe shock and had for a few minutes an attack of nerves. But this accident upset her plans for the day; now the list of her engagements was a long one to judge by the white leather-cased slate placed on the front of the carriage, with the little clock and case of visiting-cards. For that reason the young woman's pretty face, with its fine and delicate features, tenuous profile and clear blue eyes lighting up a cloud of warm golden hair, expressed annoyance, bordering upon anger, as she got out of her carriage in the midst of an already large crowd. The general curiosity of which she was the object completed her ill humour, and it was in a very severe voice, though she was usually so just and

even indulgent to her servants, that she said to her footman—

"François, as soon as the horse is on his legs again leave clumsy d'Armé to put things right. I shall require a carriage in less than half an hour at the house of Madame de Tillières."

She walked away, though she was wearing boots which were almost too delicate for that exercise, towards the Rue Matignon, where her friend lived. The footman, a fine fellow in a long livery coat, who looked quite sheepish and was very pale still from the fright he had experienced at the horse's fall, had hardly finished saying, "Yes, Madame la Comtesse," when his fellow-servant, who had climbed down from his seat, looking very red with humiliation, began to rate him upon the clumsiness of his efforts at assistance. But Madame de Candale had made her way through this crowd of the curious. Her thoughts were fully occupied by the disturbance of her afternoon's programme.

"Clumsy fellow!" she said to herself, "an accident like that is sure to happen on one's busiest afternoon. . . . Even supposing that Juliette is at home? If she is not, so much the worse. I shall wait at her mother's. I hope, though, that I shall find her at home. It is a week since I saw her. In Paris there is no time for anything."

As she talked to herself, she walked along, holding high her little head on which she had a delightful mauve hat, and displaying her fine figure in a long grey cloak with its trimming of feathers of the same shade. She was the object of attention of all the passers-by who favoured

her with that look in which a woman can read, in her youth, the triumph, in her old age, the defeat, of her beauty. When the pedestrian has that inimitable air of a great lady as Gabrielle de Candale had it, quite a comedy is played when a gentleman meets her. He passes her and you would think that he had not seen her. But wait till he has gone two steps further and observe the quick gesture with which he turns, once, twice, three times, to follow her with his eyes. Let the physiologists explain this mystery! She has not needed to turn to be sure of the effect produced, and, let moralists explain this other mystery, she is always flattered by the effect produced, whether the passer-by is hump-backed, bandy-legged or one-armed, even when she bears, as Madame de Candale did, one of the great historical names of France! Really she had not in her set the reputation of being a coquette. She had just escaped a real danger. She would have to dispense with her new carriage, which was a very deep English vehicle with narrow windows, and had been built in London to a special design barely two months before, for some time perhaps. She had certainly lost a horse, one of the best in her stable. All this was sufficient to make her reach the house in the Rue Matignon in a bad temper. But when the charming saint, as her friend she was visiting aptly called her, rested her gloved hands upon the gate, the look of irritation had disappeared from her face. She had enjoyed, during her five minutes' walk, from the glances cast at her by her anonymous admirers, the pleasure of feeling that she was very pretty. She had even assumed the

half-roguish expression she wore on days of gaiety while she crossed the courtyard and reached a little stone staircase on the left which was protected by a glass screen. But it might have been her pleasure at finding out from the porter that Madame de Tillières had not gone out. To discover at once a confidant to whom to tell the story of an accident, is almost enough to make one rejoice at the accident, and as she rang the bell the Countess smiled at this thought.

"I am sure my friend will be more frightened than I was."

Although but a few years have passed since the events of which this unexpected visit was the prologue, how many people in Paris and even in Madame de Candale's set recall the charming and mysterious woman whom she called "my friend," when she spoke of her to herself in the silence of her heart, and when she spoke of her aloud to others? So to understand this story it will not be out of place to sketch in a few lines the portrait of this woman who has disappeared, and who was not very well known even to the friends of her friend. Madame de Tillières was one of these women of the world who are reserved and modest even to effacement, and who display in an unostentatious way as much diplomacy as their rivals in fascination. Was there not a symbol of this character and a proof of this taste for retirement simply in the choice of this dwelling upon the narrow step of which at the moment Gabrielle's aristocratic silhouette was visible? An atmosphere of solitude floated around this house, which was divided from the main body of the

buildings by a courtyard, and surrounded by gardens on the side facing the Rue du Cirque. Besides, did not the whole of the Rue Matignon, with the long wall bordering it on one side, with its old houses which had not changed since the last century, avoided as it was by carriages which preferred to go from the Champs Elysées to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré by the Avenue d'Antin, present at certain hours a paradox of provincial tranquillity in this modern and lively quarter? Even the little isolated staircase with its glass screen had a novel appearance. Its five steps covered with faded carpet ended in a door, the upper part of which had been glazed to admit light to an ante-room and had red curtains on the inside. It was neither a commonplace house, for it had four stories, nor a real mansion, for Madame de Tillières and her mother, Madame de Nançay, only occupied the ground and first floors: it was, however, quite a private house, as far as they were concerned, for they had built an inner staircase which connected their rooms and saved them from the necessity of using the main staircase. Without exaggerating the significance of these details, in the same way that the display of luxury always supposes some vanity, the preference given to a somewhat melancholy dwelling in a street, a little apart, rather reveals a certain reserve and something like a fear of social success. Then, too, if Madame de Tillières had not studied in every way to defend her privacy, would she have solved the difficult problem of remaining a widow at twenty, and of spending the ten years following her bereavement in Paris, free, wealthy,

and delightful as she was, without having her name mentioned by the gossips?

So if it is natural for her casual acquaintances to have already forgotten this woman who was so unlike the smart women of the period, as a compensation her few friends—oh, they were not numerous—interested themselves in her with a fanaticism which time has not diminished. To the curious who were astonished that so pretty a woman should spend her youth in a sort of shadow, these friends invariably used this phrase in reply: "She has suffered so!" and every one said it in a tone which indicated extremely delicate confidences which were too sincere to be retailed. The tragedy which had made Juliette a widow justified this explanation of her character. The Marquis Roger de Tillières, her husband, one of the most brilliant staff-officers, had been killed in July, 1870, at the side of General Douay, by one of the first shots fired in that deplorable campaign. The news of this, being abruptly told to the Marquise, who was then seven months enceinte, had produced a terrible illness. She had regained consciousness, the mother, before her time, of a child, who had not lived three weeks. Was not that sufficient for her to remain crushed for ever? But however strange and terrible they may be, the events of our lives create nothing in us. At the most they depress or exalt our inmost faculties.

Even when she was happy and overwhelmed by good fortune, Madame de Tillières had always effaced herself; she had always been a woman with a very small circle of friends, almost a recluse. When this desire for effacement is not a pose, it

supposes a somewhat painful delicacy of heart in women as well-bred, as beautiful and wealthy as Juliette—for her mother had an income of more than 120,000 francs—and consequently as quickly drawn into the whirlpool of pleasure. These women must have felt from the beginning, that fashionable life consists of banality, lies and veiled brutality. An instinct within them has at once been wounded, and has made them recoil. They reflect, they refine themselves, and they become through reaction real artists in intimacy. Their need is that everything in their existence, from their furniture and their toilette, to their friendships and love affairs, must be distinguished, rare, special and individual. They force themselves to withdraw from society or else only to participate in it according to their own interpretation of the term. They remain at home a great deal, and manage so that they seem to be conferring a favour when they receive a visit. How they do it is their secret. They reach a stage, by making their company desired, when their presence in a drawing-room is another favour. This polite manœuvre is not without a danger to themselves, that first of all of attaching excessive importance to their personality, and also, by thinking too much of their own sentiments, of developing in their own souls the maladies of artifice and complication. But acquaintance with these women has infinite attraction. Does it not suppose a choice which in itself alone is a constant flattery to the vanity of their friends? Then it abounds in small attentions and daily petting. Knowing in detail the characters of all those

about them, their tact spares one even the slightest offence. They are, after one has lived in their sphere of affection, indispensable and irreplaceable. They leave behind them, when they disappear, a memory as deep as it is select, and this was Juliette's destiny. Even to-day if you meet the most faithful of the habitués of the little drawing-room in the Rue Matignon, Félix Miraut the painter, Général de Jardes, M. d'Avançon the old diplomat, and M. Ludovic Accragne the retired magistrate, tell them, as a test, some anecdote which lends itself to comment; if they are talking in confidence the conversation will not end without them saying—

"If you had known Madame de Tillières."

Or else—

"These were the kind of people one was sure not to meet at the house of Madame de Tillières."

Or else—

"I never saw any one but Madame de Tillières who——" But do not insist. If you do you will see them assume an absorbed expression and return to their habitual topics of conversation! Miraut to his last flower picture; Jardes to his new army scheme; d'Avançon to his secret mission in Italy near Sadowa; Ludovic Accragne to the subject of night-shelters, in which he takes a keen interest. They seem to have acquired, in the school of their friend of the past, that habit of discretion which women of that nature demand from their adorers. Besides, could the painter in his concrete and picturesque expressions, the general in his technical language, the diplomat in his polite phrases, and the ex-minister in the official stiffness

of his words, have conveyed that exquisite thing charm which Madame de Tillières possessed to a unique degree? Charm! Only a woman when she has dearly loved another, a thing occasionally to be found, can in a whispered confidence convey that mysterious something, that magic grace which surrounds the indefinable word. To realize Madame de Tillières in the innocent and lasting witchery of her seductiveness, one must turn to Madame de Candale when she is willing to speak of her, and that is not often, for the poor saint sometimes tries to avoid the recollection of her with a feeling akin to remorse. It is so difficult, when the fibre of scruple vibrates within us, not to consider ourselves to some extent the cause of the misfortunes of which we have been the occasion; and how many times has the beautiful Countess seen herself in thought ringing the bell at her friend's door on that fine March afternoon, with this idea——"If I had not spoken to her that day? If I had not called upon her in the Rue Matignon?"

Must it be called chance or destiny, this continual unexpected sport of events with one another, which wills that all the good or bad fortune of a person shall depend upon a horse falling in the road, upon a coachman's clumsiness, upon the breaking of a shaft and the visit resulting from it?

Whether chance, destiny or providence, it is certain that Madame de Candale had none of these ideas nor any sorrowful presentiment when the footman conducted her through the large drawing-room to the smaller one where Juliette usually sat. She was writing seated at a narrow desk placed behind

a low screen in the angle of the French window, so that it was only necessary for her to raise her eyes to see the garden. The trees, on this bright day of early spring, were showing their lilac buds at the points of their black branches. The short sparse blades of grass were emerging from the brown earth, and as only an ivy-clad wall divided this garden from two larger ones extending to the Rue du Cirque, it was almost a leafless park from which she withdrew her pretty face when seeing Madame de Candale she got up to kiss her with a cry of glad surprise.

" Look," she said, " I am dressed. I am waiting for my carriage. I was going to call upon you."

" You would not have found me at home," the Countess replied, " and then perhaps there would have been no one to tell you that, such as I am, you had a narrow escape of never seeing me again."

" What foolishness ! "

" But I have just escaped a grave danger."

" You alarm me."

Gabrielle began the story, which she exaggerated somewhat, as all women do, of her carriage accident, while Juliette listened to her and punctuated her account with little exclamations. This room, brightened by the March sun and warmed by a log fire was an appropriate nest for two friends' intimate talk, and especially two such real friends as these. You looked in vain for the litter of stuffs and nicknacks usual among the Parisian ladies of to-day. Through an intellectual and aristocratic fantasy, the Marquise had simply transported to the Rue Matignon the furniture of

one of the boudoirs of Nançay, so that in its tiniest details this drawing-room displayed the taste of the days of Louis XVI—the period when the castle was restored by the grandfather of Madame de Tillières, Charles de Nançay, the protector of Rivarol. The white and somewhat neutral tints of the elegantly carved woods, the blue shades of the ancient tapestry harmonized with the few old pictures hanging on its walls in their gilded frames. Had Juliette the idea that this style of a hundred years ago suited better than any other the particular character of her beauty? It is certain that with a cloud of powder upon her blond hair—a blond as ashy as Gabrielle's was golden—with a beauty-spot at the corner of her fine mouth, with rouge upon her rosy cheeks, with high-heeled slippers upon her tiny feet, and a Marie-Antoinette dress around her slender waist, she would have looked like a contemporary of the famous Marquise Laure de Nançay, whose portrait over the fireplace was the companion picture to that of the Marquis Charles. Even without beauty spots, powder, rouge and slippers she resembled, with an almost alarming likeness, that great grandmother who was so unworthily recompensed for her most romantic passion. In Juliette's face, as in that of her pretty ancestor, the gracious expression, which seemed almost childish in conjunction with her fragile Saxon beauty, was corrected by the profoundness of her glance and the sorrowful curve of her smile.

A detail of physiognomy effected the transformation in Madame de Tillières from the somewhat delicate prettiness of the eighteenth century to a

dreamy charm. At moments when she was moved without desiring to appear so, the sudden dilation of the pupils making her beautiful and tender blue eyes appear almost black, gave the feeling that hers was a morbid nervousness restrained by a most powerful will. This face, in which there was at the same time so much high breeding and restrained passion, presented a strange contrast to that of Madame de Candale, which was as delicately patrician, as refined by centuries of heredity, but also full of energy and action. The Countess, who lived as if she were hypnotized by her worship of the terrible Maréchal de Candale, the friend of Montluc and his rival in massacre, would have been in the days of religious warfare,one of those fierce warriors, whose cruelties are narrated in L'Estoile, and in still more recent days, a Royalist insurgent, one of the Amazons of La Vendée and Cotentin who fired in the streets with as much boldness as the bravest of their companions. The Marquise de Tillières, tender and gentle though she was, made one think of these heroines of the life of love whose type history has incarnated in the touching face of a La Vallière or of an Aissé. One was a Van Dyck stepped out of her canvas, and the other a pastel of days gone by animated by mysterious enchantment. But if a moral analogy corresponded to the external, if in fact one had the secret springs of heroism in her while the other had the veiled abysses of passion, their conversation would not have betrayed it to the most subtle of listeners. As soon as the story of the accident was over, this Van Dyck dressed by Worth and this pastel attired by Doucet had begun to

discuss their plans for the week, and it was simply the chat of two friends who in turn discussed chiffons, calls or parties, and continued their gossip till they came to the inevitable phrase which the Countess uttered—

"But when are you coming to dine with me and have a real talk? Will to-morrow suit you?"

"To-morrow? No," Madame de Tillières said. "I have my cousin de Nançay coming here. Will Thursday do?"

"Thursday? Thursday? I am not free that day? I am dining at my sister d'Arcole's. What about Friday?"

"That is a bargain," Juliette said with a laugh; "I dine at the d'Avançons. You understand that I have to bring peace to my admirer's household. Only Madame d'Avançon retires very early, and as it is your day for a box at the Opéra, if you have nobody else——"

"No one at all. That is perfect. Don't order your carriage. I will fetch you at nine o'clock from the d'Avançons. But Friday is a very long way off. I have an idea: suppose you come this evening just in the ordinary way?"

"But," Madame de Tillières answered, "look at this letter upon my desk which I had just finished when you came in. I was writing to Miraut, who long ago asked me for an evening, and as I was alone with mother——"

"Don't send the letter, that is all," the Countess said, "and you will do me a great service. This dinner is rather a bore. All the sportsmen will be there, Prosny, d'Artelles, Mosé and the rest"

—and, with a hesitating movement—"there is one, too, whom you would not care to know. You are so, what the English call, particular."

"And the French call it prudish or proud," Juliette interrupted her, beginning to laugh; "all because I will not come to you at times when there is a crush. Who is this mysterious person whom I ought to forbid you to introduce to me?"

"Oh! there is nothing mysterious about him," Gabrielle went on; "he is Raymond Casal."

"Madame de Corcieux's admirer?" asked Juliette; and on receiving an affirmative gesture from the Countess: "The fact is," she maliciously added, "the severe Poyanne will disapprove of me. I shall not escape the phrase: 'Why does Madame de Candale receive men like that?'"

Without doubt the friend at whose somewhat shadowy surveillance Madame de Tillières gaily joked was not in great favour with the Countess, for she had a gleam of wicked joy in her eyes at this mockery, and as if encouraged she resumed—

"First of all, you will tell him that he is my husband's friend rather than mine. Then, shall I speak frankly? Casal, does not he seem to be to you, to Poyanne, to every one, a bad fellow, who only cultivates a woman's society to accomplish her ruin, a coxcomb who has compromised Madame de Hacqueville, Madame Ethorel, Madame de Corcieux and a thousand others; a gambler who plays high, a brute who only gets up from the gaming table to mount a horse, fence, hunt and finishes the evening by getting as drunk as a lord? That is the kind of fellow your Casal is, and as for your Poyanne——"

"My Casal?" interrupted Juliette, "I do not know him, and my Poyanne? no, I will not be responsible for the antipathies of my friends: be just."

"Yes, yes, your Poyanne," the Countess insisted. "Come, if he were a widower instead of being simply separated from his wife, and if his hussy of a wife gave him a surprise by dying at Florence, where she leads a life?"

"Ah well! finish," Madame de Tillières said.

"I have always had an idea that you would be capable of marrying him, and I believe he thinks so, too, for he mounts guard over you as if you were his fiancée."

"First of all I do not believe that he cherishes such a dark project," Juliette said, laughing heartily; "and then I don't know what answer I should give if the opportunity arose; and then a fiancée of twenty-nine years and eight months old can brave the seductions of a foppish man of the world, a great gambler, something of a jockey, fencer, and very much of a drunkard, for that is the somewhat unflattering portrait of your guest."

"You took the words out of my mouth when I was about to tell you that this legend is no more like the real Casal than the Napoleon III of the Châtiments our poor emperor. A fop? Is it his fault if he has come across three or four fools who have labelled him? Your laughter is all in vain. Yes, they have labelled him! Pauline de Corcieux did so. After their rupture who was it cried out so loudly of the other's wickedness? He or she? Of this I am sure, never, do you hear? never has he said a word out of place to me, and I pride my-

self upon being a most honourable woman. He is intelligent and interesting with his numerous anecdotes of his extensive travels. The Orient, India, China, Japan, he has travelled through the whole world. Man of the world? Gambler? He was wealthier than most men, and has had more horses and lost more money. That is the cause of people's indignation. It is possible that he has a mania for fencing. But he does not talk about it, and I have never heard it said that he has abused his skill with the sword. It is possible, also, that he drinks, but he has always had the good taste to visit me when master of himself. Do you know what this boy is? A spoiled child to whom life has been too pleasant, but who has retained a heap of charming qualities. He is good-looking too! Have you seen him?"

"I believe he was once pointed out to me at the Opéra," Juliette said: "a big man with black hair and a light beard."

"That is some time ago, then," Gabrielle went on. "He only wears a moustache now. How droll is life in Paris! You ought to have met at least a hundred times."

"I go out so little," Juliette said, "and besides, in my abstraction, I hardly recognize any one."

"Well, will you come out this evening to see handsome Casal; yes or no?"

"Yes. But how you speak of him! How excited you get! If I did not know you——"

"You would say that I was in love with him, would you not? What can you expect? I have the blood of battle in my veins, and a horror of the world's injustice. But don't go and denounce me to Poyanne!"

"Ah! Poyanne again," said Juliette with a shrug of her fine shoulders.

"Yes," the Countess replied with a shake of the head. "When he is not there, everything is right. Then he talks to you, and I have always noticed how a word from him influences you. But here is some one to say that the carriage has come."

You can imagine the good-bye gossip, which was a repetition of that on the arrival, when the servant actually announced that the Countess' carriage was waiting, the "already," the "but you have only just come." The "good-bye till to-night, love"; then the kisses and laughter when Casal's name was again mentioned, and then silence hardly broken by the ticking of the clock and the crackling of the fire when Madame de Candale had gone. Juliette, left alone, sat down again at her desk, and after tearing up the note intended for Miraut, she took a sheet of paper to write another, which must have been much more difficult to compose, for she turned and returned the penholder in her fingers as she gazed at the garden which now looked more desolate under the dark sky, and these were the lines she decided to write—

"Dear Friend,—

"Do not come this evening before eleven. Gabrielle has just gone. I had not seen her for ten days, so I had to accept her invitation to dinner this evening. It would not be polite to leave her directly afterwards. Don't sulk because I am postponing for two hours the pleasure of listening to you as you tell me what took place in the House to-day, and how you spoke. Don't

come with disappointed eyes in which I can read a reproach for what you so incorrectly call my social side. You know what the world is to me without you—without you, ah! how I should like to have the right to proclaim to all what a friend you are to your "JULIETTE."

Then in the place reserved for the address, when she had finished, she wrote the name of a speaker from the right benches well known at that time, who filled at Versailles a rôle very similar to that which M. de Mun so nobly does to-day. The name was no other than Count Henry de Poyanne—and this proves that even the most intimate friends only indulge in half confidences. For if Madame de Candale suspected, as we have seen, the sentiments of Poyanne for Madame de Tillières, she was a thousand miles away from thinking that these feelings were shared, and that a *liaison* as lover and mistress united these two persons. The most honourable women—and although Gabrielle said it a little too often, she was one of them—have that artlessness which proves their honour. How many other things did that message, reading between the lines, betray? If Juliette had carefully read it through instead of despatching it at once, would she not have noticed that its coquettish and caressing phrases concealed, or made amends for, an act of perfidy? No. But it was a slight infidelity all the same. Is it not an act of infidelity for a mistress to take an action, at which she knows beforehand her lover will be pained, and would not Poyanne, who was speaking at an important sitting of the House, be

wounded when he learnt that Juliette, who could have seen him at eight o'clock, after making a frivolous excuse for not doing so, had still further postponed their meeting to dine with some one he did not like ? She had not told Gabrielle that several times on behalf of Madame de Corcieux, whose husband he knew, Poyanne had criticized Casal very harshly. If she had read the note again the pretty widow would perhaps have asked herself why, bound as she was for life—since she and Poyanne had secretly exchanged a promise of marriage—she began to feel, through listening to Gabrielle, a strange curiosity about this Casal who was so obnoxious to her future husband. She would have perhaps concluded from it, if she had been quite frank with herself, that into her sentiment for Poyanne a little weariness had begun to creep, and from a little weariness to terrible boredom the distance is as small and quickly traversed as that between a little curiosity and much coquetry ! But can we ever unravel the tangle of a thousand threads which is constructed in our thoughts behind the phrases of our letters when we are writing to some one who is very near to our heart ? There is a secret sense in our love letters as in the tragic events in which we take part, and when Juliette, half an hour later, stopped her carriage before the post-office in the Rue Montaigne to put the note into the box herself, she no more suspected what was the real actual meaning of her wheedling prose than Madame de Candale suspected the fatal importance which her unexpected invitation would assume in the existence of her dearest friend.

CHAPTER II

THE UNKNOWN

MADAME DE TILLIÈRES usually, when she dined out, dressed very early in order to be present when her mother dined, even if she did not dine with her. Madame de Nançay retained from her thirty years of country life the habit of sitting down to table exactly at a quarter to seven. The dining-room on the first floor, with accommodation for only ten or a dozen people, was the common property of the two women. The mother, who adored her daughter for her daughter's sake and not her own—a very rare sentiment among mothers and daughters—had set herself the task of arranging their homes in such a way that their two existences were lived side by side without being intermingled. She had her floor, her drawing-room, her servants, and her independent day's programme; she always rose at six, summer and winter, to attend mass at a neighbouring convent, retired to rest at nine o'clock, and rarely descended to the ground floor. She wished Juliette to be as free as if she lived alone, and at the same time protected. In the excess of her abnegation she reproached herself for accepting the petting which Madame de Tillières gave her, before every one of her visits. She, however, accepted it, for she realized that if she did not, Juliette, who, as it was, went out but little, would not go out at all. Then, too, she

experienced such delight in seeing her daughter in the glory of her toilette! They sometimes passed moments of the tenderest intimacy. There was rarely a third person present. From the first when Poyanne began to pay court to Juliette, he invented never-ending pretexts for coming and caressing with his eyes this delicate picture: the young woman in her magnificent dress waiting upon her mother, who always wore mourning, in the silent dining-room, lit by the light of two great lamps of the Empire pattern, perched upon their high columns. Since his relations with Madame de Tillières had changed, he experienced a feeling of shame when he met Madame de Nançay's eyes. This orator, renowned for his coolness in the face of a hostile assembly, felt himself in her venerable presence to be a prey to those painful apprehensions which a guilty secret inflicts upon the straightforward. He feared those intelligent blue eyes, somewhat dulled by age, but still the only sign of youth about her withered face: although she was barely sixty, Madame de Nançay appeared more than seventy, so much had her own sorrows and those of her daughters poisoned the springs of her life. She had lost, one blow after the other, her husband and her two sons in the year which preceded Juliette's widowhood. This sorrowing mother, who obviously dwelt in thought with her dead, brightened up with touching joy when she had her only remaining child with her, dressed, smiling and caressing her, as in the half hour which preceded her departure to dine with Madame de Candale. This evening Juliette wore a dress of black lace above a skirt of rose silk

with bows of the same colour. In her hair and beautiful ears pearls gleamed. Her high corsage just displayed the beginning of her throat and supple shoulders, set off the firm pillar of her neck, and outlined the slenderness of her bust. Dressed like this she had the combined grace of a young woman and young girl. Her half-naked arms moved hither and thither, and her beautiful hands, loaded with rings, were ceaselessly engaged in rendering some small service to the old mother, pouring out her drink, preparing her bread, or selecting fruit for her. As she performed these delicate attentions her eyes shone and her blonde complexion seemed more rosy than usual. A gayer smile wrinkled her mouth, in the right-hand corner of which a dimple also formed. This was her expression on her happy days. Her mother looked happily upon her joyous face. She knew at the first glance whether her Juliette was prepared to endure a function or to really enjoy herself, and this amusement represented to her, with a resumption of taste for society, the chances of another marriage for the girl, whom she feared she would soon have to leave alone; and so after a few minutes' silence she said, in the clear loud voice of the deaf, as she put her trembling hand to her ear the better to hear the answer—

"I feel almost jealous of Gabrielle since the prospect of a visit to her seems to amuse you. Who is to be there?"

"Not many fashionable people," Madame de Tillières replied, feeling herself blush as she did so. "A few sportsmen. She has invited me to keep her company."

"It is the object-lesson of that household which prevents you from remarrying," Madame de Nançay said, shaking her head, and adding in melancholy tones: "Poor little woman, so courageous, and with a step like a child's!"

"Yes," Juliette replied, "so courageous," and the brightness of her eyes was dulled for a moment at the thought of the secret sorrow which preyed upon her friend's life. Louis de Candale when still a boy was the lover of a Madame Bernard, the wife of a rich manufacturer, by whom he had a son. Almost immediately after his marriage, this *liaison* was resumed in a semi-public manner, and had been endured for ten years by the Countess with a proud resignation which a single detail will explain. Their wealth belonged to her, and the noble woman did not wish the last of the Candales to be reduced to living upon an allowance granted him by his insulted wife. Then, too, she still hoped for a son to bear the family name she had so long and romantically worshipped. Last of all she loved her husband in spite of everything. Madame de Tillières gathered this sad story from Gabrielle's confidences, and knew it too intimately not to share in its bitterness. She added, completing her mother's sentence: "I do not believe that I should ever have that patience."

"Come!" Madame de Nançay went on, "I was wrong to introduce such a sad subject. I do not like you as you are now, sorrowing. Let me see you smile before leaving me and be gay as you were just now. I was so happy. It was at least six months since I had seen your eyes like they were then."

"Dear mother," Juliette thought a quarter of

an hour later, as her carriage was bearing her towards the Rue de Tilsitt, where the Candales lived,—"how she loves me! How she knows my eyes; how she can read in them! But still, it is quite true that the idea of this dinner with Gabrielle amuses me as if I were a child! Why?"

"Yes, why?" That question, which she had not asked herself, either after her talk with her friend, or after writing the letter to Henry de Poyanne, suddenly engrossed her, when she was sitting in the corner of the carriage, as a result of her mother's remarks. That is the place where women reflect the most deeply, because in that place they feel most isolated and most protected against the life simmering around them. Ten minutes passed like this—the ten minutes separating the Rue Matignon from the Rue de Tilsitt had often sufficed for Madame de Tillières to analyse all the little facts observed in one evening. This time it would have taken hours and hours to reconstruct the work done in her head since her conversation with Gabrielle, and although this silent woman was accustomed to see very clearly within herself, she must of necessity be mistaken as to the nature of this work.

The little seed of curiosity first sown in her by the name of Casal had, if the expression is permissible, germinated in her reverie. All the afternoon during her occupations she had allowed herself to think of him; receiving, without suspicion, the pictures which floated around his name. In this way Madame de Corcieux appeared to her, as she had met her at the time of her rupture with Casal, in a state of melancholy consternation, and

changed beyond recognition. There is, in every woman's heart, a certain amount of available interest at the service of a man capable of making himself loved like that till death. This obscure interest had been formerly awakened in Madame de Tillières, who remembered feeling for the dismissed lover infinite pity, and then asking herself: "What can there be in this man to make her cling to him even to the point of dishonouring herself?" Casal still possessed, to arouse that strange curiosity in Madame de Tillières, that power of seduction which professional libertines exercise over many honourable women. Now Juliette, having yielded to her lover, as she had done, for quite moral reasons, had known how to retain all the delicacy of an honourable woman, even in the irregularity of a situation which she and Poyanne looked upon as a marriage.

This fascination projected, as it may be called, by the Don Juans upon the Elviras—to use the immortal symbol which Molière has given us—has often been noted and as often deplored. It still remains an insoluble problem. Some seem to see in it the feminine pendant of that masculine folly which a humorous misanthrope has called "redemptorism," the desire to purchase courtesans with love. Others diagnose it simply as vanity. In being loved by a libertine, has not an honourable woman the satisfaction of carrying him off from many rivals and from those whom her virtue renders most hateful? Perhaps we can solve this riddle by admitting that it exists as a law of the situation of the heart. We have only a limited capacity to receive impressions of a certain

kind. The capacity once filled, we are impotent to admit contrary impressions. One little fact corroborates this hypothesis: this libertine attraction only begins in honourable women at about the age of thirty, and when a life of virtue has given them everything possible in the way of serious pleasures. Without doubt Madame de Tillières, when she came to Paris at the conclusion of the war as a young widow, full to overflowing with grief and pride, would have felt an immediate antipathy for Casal's personality, which had now occupied her attention more and more every minute during the last few hours. Amid the whirl of her thoughts, she "crystallized" an inclination without suspecting it, for this man with whom she was about to pass the evening. She believed herself sincere when she answered the question, which she had so boldly propounded to herself: "I am curious to know a person of whom, in spite of his reputation, Gabrielle makes such a special point; that is all." She added, to justify what she felt, in spite of everything, to be a somewhat morbid impulse towards this meeting: "It is the forbidden fruit story again." In any case, whether unhealthy or not, this impulse would have been quite invisible even to the most subtle observer when she alighted from her carriage in the courtyard of the Candale mansion, so clear and calm was her voice, as she said to the coachman: "At a quarter to eleven," and so peacefully candid did her mysterious face appear on her entry in the hall where the guests were already assembled; and she hardly seemed to notice him, when introduced to the man she had specially accepted the in-

vitation to meet. Casal bowed in his turn with similar indifference, so much so that Gabrielle, who was engaged in watching them, feared from her friend's frigidness that she had received a lecture from Poyanne. She approached Juliette and whispered—

"Well! what do you think of him?"

"But," Madame de Tillières said with a smile, "I am not thinking of him at all. He is a fine fellow; at any rate there is plenty of him."

"I told you he was not your sort," Madame de Candale went on. "I warned you I should put him by your side at dinner. If you are annoyed about it, I have still time to alter the arrangement."

"What would be the use?" Juliette replied, bowing her head graciously. "Don't go to that trouble."

Gabrielle did not insist further. At the same time this excessive indifference appeared to her hardly natural, and she was right. The two women were great friends. But the distinction between men's and women's friendship is that the former would not be exchanged without absolute confidence, while the latter dispenses with it. A woman friend never believes all that her friend tells her, but this continual reciprocal suspicion does not prevent them from loving each other dearly. Really, no man had produced on Madame de Tillières since she had returned to society, a similar impression, in the suddenness of its shock, to that which, at the first glance, Madame de Corcieux's old lover had given her. Her expectation, having as it were strung all the cords of her heart, she was prepared to feel with unaccustomed intensity, either the sorrow of her deception or

the pleasure of meeting a person about whom she was extremely curious.

Now Casal had in his appearance something very striking to a somewhat romantic mind, even without preliminary imagination. This young man realized in full the enigmatic contrast between his reputation and his person, upon which Madame de Candale had so insisted that she had excited Juliette's curiosity. He was not in any respect the "fine fellow" of whom the latter had spoken with such disdainful hypocrisy, nor was he any more like the displeasing picture she had retained in her memory, that of seeing him leaning upon the velvet-covered edge of a box with an expression of mournful insolence. There is a period of apogee for all faces, a particular time when they display the entire intensity of their expression. In some men, muscular and passionate like him, that period concides with that of their second youth. Casal was thirty-seven. The fatigues of a life of pleasure, which exhaust the lymphatics, congest the blood vessels and ruin the nerves, those exorbitant and never-ending fatigues of day and night had refined and almost spiritualized him. They had impressed themselves upon his face in lines which attracted thought, in marks which made one believe in his inward and noble melancholy. His complexion displayed that characteristic, which cannot be acquired, a warm and uniform pallor impregnable to the excesses of the past in play or the keen lash of the fresh air in sport. His short black hair displayed a square forehead, divided by the line of the will, which began to increase in size towards the temples. Upon this

forehead there seemed to be reverie as well as sorrow in the wrinkles near the eyes, and penetrating refinement in the pupils which were of a clear green verging on grey. The straight nose and firm chin completed the strength of this somewhat hollow face, in which the sensuality of the mouth was partly hidden beneath the veil of a blond-chestnut moustache. Casal had made the excuse of a voyage to India to change his style of hair-dressing and cut off the beard, in which a few silver threads had already begun to appear. His hollow cheeks were marked by a bitter wrinkle, which betrayed the disenchantment of a man who has smiled with disgust at too many things. His was a face at the same time old and young, energetic and languid, with features which at once dispelled all idea of vulgarity. It appeared almost incredible that such a physiognomy should belong to a professional man of the world, though the body, slender in its robustness, displayed his habits of daily exercise.

Casal, who was by nature big and strong, had hardly passed a day since his earliest youth without taking part in violent exercise, fencing or tennis, boxing or riding, hunting or yachting. His almost too elaborate dress revealed the childish solicitude, after the age of twenty-five, of a leader of the fashion. But he seemed to think so little of it! Such an obvious elegance of manner emanated from his entire person, that he appeared to have been created after that manner, like an aristocratic animal, fabricated by Nature to dress and exist in that way and in no other. The "tout ensemble" was at the same time masculine and pretty, very virile and vaguely effeminate. and this explained

to Madame de Tillières at once the reason this man had inspired almost tragic passions in a world of caprice and frivolity; why, too, the other men, including Poyanne, had such particular animosity for him. Women, who know us much better than we think they do, are very well aware that the success of our fellows with them excites in the whole body a feeling of envy equal to the jealousy inspired in her sisters by the successful love affairs of a woman. Casal's simple exterior must inflict constant humiliation on most of those who were in his company, and of all masculine vanities, physical vanity, by being the least acknowledged, is all the more passionate and jealous.

"It is quite certain that he is not like the others." This little phrase, which contained the germ of a new ferment of ideas, Madame de Tillières pronounced in her own mind a quarter of an hour later, and it was the result of one of those examinations in which the most absorbed women excel and which sum up a fresh comer in a few rapid glances. They know what sort of eyes, teeth, hands and hair you have, and have grasped your gestures, habits, humour and education before you are aware that they have looked at you. Dinner was announced, and Casal gave his arm to Juliette to pass into the dining-room on the first floor reserved for personal friends. Although this dining-room had been furnished in the opposite style to the large one, to act as a framework for intimate conversation, a detail in it revealed the character of the Countess, who belonged to what might be called the "Champs Elysées" set of the Faubourg Saint Germain, that is to say the reverse of the

smart people of the neighbourhood of the Rue Saint Guillaume; she had as well as her aristocratic birth a taste for the most modern and up-to-date elegance, although certain trifles would not admit of her being mistaken for a very rich woman and nothing else. As an example she had hung upon a panel in this dining-room one of the ten tapestries which, still in good preservation, had been the princely gift of the Duke d'Albe to the old Maréchal de Candale when on a secret embassy to him.

There was not a corner of this house, at the same time so modern and so full of relics of a terrible past, which did not display this young woman's strange cult for her bloodthirsty ancestor. The tapestry, in particular, woven at Bruges and representing a march of German foot-soldiers through a wood with their pikes erect, appeared in this small room with an inscription recalling its illustrious donor, as the sign of the aristocratic pride so dear to her. Perhaps her taste for the past might have stamped her as an upstart. But women like Gabrielle, who desire to shine as brilliantly as their nouveau riche rivals and be distinguished from them, readily become as proud of their nobility as if it were of yesterday. It is one of the thousand forms of conflict which have been waged for the last hundred years between young and old France. Madame de Candale did say " when a person is descended as we are . . ." with the same pride of race as if she were not really an authentic Candale, married to a cousin who was as much a Candale as she was, but that did not prevent her having at her table, as she did

that evening, by the side of her sister the Duchess d'Arcole, the wife of a grandson of one of Bonaparte's Marshals, and the grandson of a famous banker of Vienna, M. Alfred Mosé ! It is true that the Mosé family had been converted for two generations. Of the other three guests, one only, the Vicomte de Prosny, was descended from a family on an equality with that of the great Marshal. But the barony d'Artelles dated from the reign of Louis Philippe, while Casal was the son of a manufacturer who had made his money out of railways and become a Senator. Such are the inconsistencies of a time when the most inflexible pretensions clash with the irresistible necessities of habit.

Louis de Candale had a passion for the chase, and large though his wife's fortune was, he had, in order to satisfy this no doubt hereditary taste and to maintain the best shooting in France, to accept partners from his club. In that way Mosé, whose only occupation was to lead a life of fashion, and who had succeeded, after ten years' diplomacy, in entering the portals of the Jockey Club, held too important a position not to be treated as a friend by his associate and the latter's wife. The Countess, who was too good a Christian, too intelligent, and too just to give way to antisemitic fanaticism, affected to be very averse to strangers, so that she might avoid having to receive her enemy Madame Bernard, a member of the Heurtrel family of Brussels, and she disentangled herself from the contradiction which admitted Mosé to her intimate friendship, by adroit phrases, so as to excuse this exception by emphasizing it. She praised this

friend of the Count for his discretion, for his exquisite tone, and for the generosity which he displayed to all works of charity. These eulogies were deserved. For this fair man, who was bald at forty-five, with his fine eyes set in a thin bloodless face, possessed in the highest degree that method in his adopted career, which remains the secret of the success of the powerful race, the type of which he retained in spite of his baptism.

He played his part as a gentleman with irreproachable strictness. Had a philosopher been among the guests would he not have experienced an intense impression of the irony of fate on seeing the descendant of the most persecuted race in history sitting beneath a tapestry given by one furious persecutor to another? Another ironical scene presented itself when Madame d'Arcole handled English silver plate sitting at a table arranged in the English fashion, seeing that the first Duke d'Arcole had become famous through his implacable hatred of the English people and his letter of provocation to Hudson Lowe. But philosophers are very scarce in the world of fashion, and when they do appear it is at once to drown their philosophy in a debauch of snobbery. There is thus the understratum of absurd contradictions at almost every gathering, even if it only consists of five or six people. The wisest thing to do is to scrutinize the people themselves. Mosé would have been most astonished to have been reminded, while he was eating his asparagus, that the old Candale would have probably burned him; and so would d'Artelles, who was engaged in serving the Countess, sitting by his side, have been astonished

had he been reminded that his great-grandfathers minded a plough in the plains of Beauce ; so, too, would Madame de Candale have been surprised had it been pointed out to her that the action of placing Casal by the side of Juliette was not absolutely worthy of an honourable woman ; and Juliette, too, would have been astonished had she been informed that her indifference, which was becoming more and more marked towards her neighbour, concealed her growing interest. As for Prosny, who was engaged upon the first course with the enjoyment of an epicure, and the gourmand Candale, who consoled himself for his inability to invite his mistress by the excellence of his own table, they were sheltered from all the surprises of the thought. Casal, too, had knocked about the world too much to be surprised at anything.

The dinner had naturally commenced with all sorts of comments upon the carriage accident of which Madame de Candale had been the victim ; then, like all determined sportsmen even in the off-season, they could not talk for ten minutes without bringing in their favourite pastime, so the Countess' accident served as an excuse for the relating of accidents at the chase, and from these accidents the conversation quickly changed to a discussion of weapons. D'Artelles, with his rough peasant's face, liked shooting almost as much as Candale, but in a different way. For example, while the beaters were driving the game in front of the guns, he often left the party and scoured the plain or wood alone. There was something of a poacher in him, while Count Louis enjoyed sport on a lordly scale, and the slaughter of a drove of animals. For the

hundredth time they began to discuss these two sorts of sport, then went on to reminiscences of memorable days, and phrases like this could be heard—

" Do you remember, d'Artelles," Prosny said, " that wonderful sport with the Grand Dukes at La Croix Saint Joseph ? How many birds fell that day ? "

" Three thousand," d'Artelles replied, " and just my luck, I had no powder."

Madame d'Arcole listened to this conversation which she had heard a hundred times before with that singularly passive placidity, one of the last observed traits in some Italian women, and one which she had inherited from her mother, whom she resembled as strongly as Gabrielle did not at all, while Juliette complimented the latter upon the flowers on the table. In the middle in an old silver bowl was a bouquet of white lilac, great yellow roses and orchids. Other orchids of a mauve tint, with violet velvet-like hearts, filled two other smaller but just as elaborate silver bowls, and a carpet of Russian violets connected the three bouquets. To this somewhat sombre flower bed the white cloth, the glass and the plate was like a brilliant border. Candles with red shades shed a brighter light upon the table than there was in the rest of the dining-room, and showed up its tiniest details, from the little silver plates for the butter placed by the side of each person, to the delicate grace of the figures carved upon the centre pieces of the service. It was the last word in elegance, such as is rarely attained even under the roofs of the wealthiest, for it presupposes at the same time an enormous fortune, centuries of aristocratic heredity, and unique taste in the mistress of the house.

When Madame de Tillières began to praise the arrangement of the flowers and ornaments, Casal raised his head. His blonde neighbour had just uttered aloud his own thoughts at that actual second. Sandwiched between the conversation of the sportsmen and the phrases exchanged across the table by the two friends, he had not yet uttered twenty words since the beginning of the dinner. He had been content to look with pleasure on an exquisite impression of which men of natural refinement never become tired. Besides, though he never talked pictures nor ornaments, he had acquired a keen artistic sense in long talks with the two or three painters of worth, whom the quest of the profitable portrait, the caprice of a great and *galante* lady, or the vanity of visiting rich people, launches now and then, for their perdition, into the society of clubmen. In this way Casal had learned to see ; so simple an action yet so rare is it that he and Madame de Tillières alone of all the guests had enjoyed the delightful decorations around them. He had also remarked upon the tasteful toilettes of the three women, the golden-haired Madame de Candale was in red, Madame d'Arcole, with the warm languor of her complexion, her thick black hair and clear brown eyes, was in white, while Juliette with her light hair and graceful carriage wore the black lace dress. After the phrase which had made him raise his head, he began to consider his neighbour more attentively than he had done since their introduction.

At that first moment, while she was quivering with curiosity, even to her inmost fibres, he had judged her to be, as he had often done before

from a distance at the theatre, a pretty enough woman but almost insignificant. Women who, like her, possess more delicate charm than striking beauty in this way run the risk of being misjudged at first. They are like those fine landscapes in the centre of France which the tourist rapidly traverses to reach others, but which discover to those familiar with them every day, fresh beauties, making them best of all; on glancing at Madame de Tillières, with that respectfully indiscreet look, with which well-bred libertines envelop a woman, he saw that his neighbour's figure was very slender and supple, that her shoulders, arms and the line of her neck indicated an irreproachable perfection of build, and that her features, though a little small, were of almost ideal delicacy. Another person would have said at once: "She is a very pretty woman," and would have begun to lay his hand upon his heart, as the old songs used to say. But in Casal, observation once set to work went beyond the physical state and examined thoroughly character. In his existence, which was a continual round of pleasure, he had not forgotten the art of reflection. The air of superiority which he seemed to exhale from the whole of his person only half lied. His master quality, and a little real talent, applied, in default of principles, to purely elegant things, was a rare force of judgment. He possessed, in a domain of futilities, the precious gift of going straight to the essential. He was never wrong. When a new-comer visited the club, whether he came from the country or America, whether he was English, Russian or from the Argentine,

Casal could tell you exactly in a few days of what stuff he was made. He could judge a horse like a dealer, and a dinner like a chef. He it was who, having agreed to supervise the commisariat of a club which has now disappeared, the Fencing Club, on the second day called the chef simply to ask him : "Why did you use to-day butter fivepence a pound cheaper than you used yesterday ?" It was quite true. This precision of sense extended from small things to great, and Casal was just as near the mark in his estimate of the future of a play, an actor, or a book. Having, too, the good sense to remain silent when he did not know, he was never caught tripping ; he never enunciated one of those commonplace opinions which make the clever men in a drawing-room intolerable to specialists. These are the faculties which give a man mastery, and their presence or absence explains why, in a career as united and monotonous as a life of pleasure, certain persons exercise a dictatorship, while others always follow in their train.

The moralist has still to understand how the sureness of observation, the lucidity of good sense, the energy of the exact conclusion, can be combined in this way without the man who possesses them having any idea of producing a useful or even serious action. Does this strange lack of balance between the means and the end express thorough timidity, or must it be recognized as one more proof in support of that truth so well summed up by the wisdom of the language which has derived the word "corruption" from a Latin verb meaning to break ? Would the

habit of pleasure, precocious and continuous as it is, result in corruption in us, in sapping the strength of our being which creates the ideal? Whatever may be the cause of this strange effect, it is certain that Casal passed his life in sharing the debauchery of companions unworthy of him, and spent the last part of his intelligence in solving such problems as that which he set himself when Madame de Tillières attracted his attention: "What is this little woman in reality?" This little woman, as he irreverently called her in his mind, was at least worth the trouble of being studied.

This study, which began when the master of the house introduced for the guests' edification a magnum of the best year of Cos d'Estournel, first of all revealed to Raymond extraordinary agitation in the young woman. He gathered that from the rapid change of ideas in her conversation with Candale or the Countess, for she maintained her silence towards himself, then from the quivering of her lips when she smiled, and last of all by the drooping of her eyelids, with which she seemed to be trying to extinguish her own glances. From it he drew two conclusions: one was that beneath her sweet pastel-like appearance, her pale blonde hair, her transparent complexion, and clear azure eyes, Madame de Tillières was without a doubt a person of very vivid impressions, a woman of passion always engaged in self-repression and self-subjugation; the other was, that there was some one at this table in whom she was keenly interested. In a second he ran over the men present—was it Candale? No. She spoke too gaily to him. D'Artelles?

The baron would have noticed it long ago and would not have spent four evenings a week, as he did, in the wings at the Opéra Comique? This great glutton of a Vicomte had boasted for years of making Mosé wear the horns? But Madame d'Arcole, with whom the latter was talking quietly even then, and to whom he had been paying court for months, had not exchanged with Madame de Tillières one of those significant glances which jealous women never spare one another, however prudent they may be. The only one left was therefore Casal himself. In spite of his successes, or perhaps because of them, the young man was neither very vain nor very modest. He believed himself perfectly capable of inspiring more than a caprice, a passion, and at the first meeting. But he also believed that he could displease even to antipathy, and he admitted, and this proves the character of his realism, that he could pass unnoticed. That depended upon the woman and the moment in her life. At what crisis in her sentimental existence was Madame de Tillières? That was a question which the most penetrating examination could not tell a Parisian, whose only information about her was derived from little phrases like this, heard by accident—

"Madame de Tillières? She is a charming woman, so distinguished and simple."

"But, my dear, she is an unbearable poser." Or even—

"Still there are a few honourable women in the world. Look at Madame de Tillières: do you know her lover?"

"Bah! she is a sly boots, who conceals her pleasure better than the others, that is all."

"If I am the man who interests her," Casal concluded to himself, after his first meditation, "it is like fencing, I must watch her attack."

That was a wise course, more particularly as Madame de Tillières must have heard him spoken of in severe terms. He knew her personal position too well to doubt it. That sufficed for him to allot himself a part of prudence, tact, and discretion, by virtue of that method instinctively practised by all men who succeed with women: to interest them by baffling them. He, therefore, continued to efface himself, suspending the spoiled-child manners which he sometimes affected, posing as a listener rather than a talker, with the reserve of an ambassador of the old school. The result of this position was hardly as expected. Juliette, who had herself wished to see her neighbour make the first move, feared that the dinner would end without her being able to find out what there was behind the face of this man to whom she felt so strongly attracted. She suddenly asked him a question, with the object of making him talk.

"Believe me or not, as you please," Prosny, excited by the wine into displaying his penchant for tall stories, had just said, "but I knew in Normandy an armless poacher. Yes, gentlemen, his little boy loaded his gun, rested it upon a stone, and he fired it with his feet. But from his hiding-place he killed his hare as well as another man."

As the whole table protested against this fantastic anecdote, which Prosny, a native of Normandy, vouched for with his thin red face, Madame de Tillières turned to Casal, and in a slightly uncertain voice said—

"Have you, sir, no extraordinary anecdotes to tell us, like the other gentlemen?"

"Well, madame," the young man replied with a smile, "there are only a limited number of sporting stories, and they will soon be all told. But I don't know any like the one Prosny has just told us, which goes a little too far. But one can forgive sportsmen for their bragging, when one takes into consideration that this passion represents healthy and natural life in our artificial and unhealthy civilized existence."

"I must admit that I cannot see," Juliette replied, "anything healthy, and even natural in seven or eight men posting themselves on the edge of a wood to shoot at unfortunate hares and pheasants, which do not even make them stand up."

"First of all that is only one form of sport," Casal said, "but that is only a beginning. A taste is acquired for a more difficult kind of sport, and I have seen friends of mine, not many it is true, start in that way and end by tiger hunting in India, buffalo hunting in Africa, and hunting the moufflon in Turkestan. Would you believe it, madame, three friends of mine have had the courage to go to the frontier of China in search of an animal spoken of by Marco Polo, the Ovis Poli? They found and killed it."

"Have you been, yourself, on great hunting expeditions?" she asked.

"Some," he replied, "of the easiest. I have been to India, and killed my half-dozen tigers like every one else. But I have retained some unique impressions of the trip. When one has often seen the sun rise from the club windows, it is a

delightful change to watch the dawn from an elephant's back and to cross one of those vast rivers which flow red and bright beneath a flaming sky, with a little danger to make the scenery more pleasant; it is exquisite, though I don't say it would not bore one in time. I assure you, life spent at the club and in amusement seems very poor at moments like that."

"Then why do you lead it?" she asked. The little tremor which the sensation of the physical courage of man gives to every woman had been so keen during Casal's few words, that she had forgotten for a second to control herself. Her exclamation surprised herself, and made her blush a little. She found she had been very familiar, and she was afraid he would take advantage of the opportunity to become familiar with her. He had the discretion to reply with a shake of the head in a gay and innocent tone—

"It is the same story as that of a woman's unhappy marriage, madame. One plays and loses. A man begins to amuse himself, as he calls it, at twenty, because he is young. He continues to do so at fifty, because he is no longer young. A man is useless and unsuccessful. But when he knows it——"

He laughed like a child, as he said it; he had retained a childish laugh, and that was one of his graces. There is always something ridiculous in a man as blessed as Casal, very rich, fêted and free in his actions, talking of his life as a failure. But the laugh saved the statement from being ridiculous, though that quality is never perceptible to women. The cleverest

women, if they have hearts, are inclined to believe a man who will play the comedy of abortive destinies for their benefit. It is the secret romance of all of them, to console such poor wretches. Besides, perhaps Casal was not lying in condemning an existence, away from which he had been unable to break. He, too, was saturated with his habitual sensations. There was a period of silence between the two, during which was committed an error of tact. The dinner was three parts finished. That is the usual period when blunders in the conversation occur and a few glasses of wine render them almost inevitable. Baron d'Artelles had begun to talk of Madame de Corcieux whom every one present knew had been Casal's mistress. He said nothing very bad about her, but his remarks sufficed to put the young man in a false position.

"What a foolish idea," he went on, "that was of poor Pauline to suddenly become a blonde! Has she no friend to tell her that it will give her ten good years more, when she has no need of ten years or even of five?"

"That is like old Bonnivet, whom you must have often seen, madame," said the tactful Mosé addressing Gabrielle de Candale to divert the conversation; "do you know whether he dyed his hair?"

"You mean he made himself up?" Candale said.

"Suppose he got dirty?" Madame d'Arcole asked.

"Well," Mosé went on, "whatever he did, he concealed from every one including his barber, who said to me in such comic tones: "If I only dared mention it to him, I could do it

for him so nicely." At last Bonnivet fell ill. Rheumatism deprived him of the use of his limbs. I went to see him, and found his hair as white as snow. Guess his first words to me: "See how I have suffered, Mosé, I have turned quite white."

"That did not prevent," d'Artelles insisted, for like all blunderers he kept to his idea, "Madame de Corcieux from remaining as she was. About what age is she? Casal, you ought to know?"

No sooner had he said these words than the imprudent gossip realized how indiscreet they were, and stopping short he became crimson, while the silence of the whole table made the young man's position still more delicate. He could neither attack nor defend his old friend. It was quite naturally and simply that he said—

"Madame de Corcieux? when I saw her at the Opéra the other week, she was old enough to be a very pretty woman, and Bonnivet, old peer of France though he was, appeared at the Jockey Club to be a very old and broken man, although he used to say in his lordly way: 'There is no such thing as age, strength is the thing.'"

Every one laughed and the conversation changed its course. Casal, who felt that he had pleased his neighbour, took particular care that the talk remained general, so that he might skilfully narrate one or two anecdotes of his voyage to Japan. He succeeded in being so quietly witty, that on leaving the table the Countess approached him and said maliciously:—

"Have you exerted yourself much on my friend's account? Be satisfied, you have pleased her. Now go and smoke in peace. But you don't

smoke, do you ? I know you would like to talk a little more freely to the other gentlemen and drink your wine in peace. Don't drink too much, and don't be long."

The young man smiled as he bowed. But when an hour later the men came from the smoking-room, Madame de Candale looked in vain among them for his clever masculine face. He had been coquettish enough to disappear after his success. She looked at Juliette, who also noticed his absence, and not being aware that she was being observed, knitted her pretty brows. When at a quarter to eleven her carriage was announced the shade of annoyance was still visible, and the Countess' insinuating question, when she kissed her good-bye, did not tend to dissipate her ill-humour.

"You have not been very bored, have you ?" she asked. "You see Casal is better than his reputation."

"But," Juliette said, giving a little forced laugh, "he has hardly given me time to judge."

"All the same she is annoyed that he left so soon. That was clumsy of him !" Gabrielle thought when her friend had gone. But, clever though she was, she was mistaken, for in her carriage as she was being driven to the Rue de Matignon, Madame de Tillières thought of nothing but this clumsy suitor, and it was almost an unpleasant surprise to her when the footman who opened the door to her, said, as he took her cloak—

"The Count de Poyanne is waiting for you, madame."

She had quite forgotten him.

CHAPTER III

THE OTHER

JULIETTE liked nothing so well as long talks by the fireside at these somewhat irregular hours. It was so natural a taste to her that she received in this way, not only the man who had the right to her intimacy, but also the most platonic of her faithful friends, d'Avançon Félix Miraut, Général de Jardes, and Accragne among others, but always one at the time. There was a certain amount of feminine prudence in this, for the number of these visits prevented the chatter of the servants. It was especially this art of friendship which made her memory ever green among these privileged to enjoy it. She had realized, in the commonplace crowded life of Paris, how great a charm was exercised over a man by the corner of a drawing-room where he found at a certain time a young, elegant and aristocratic creature who would listen to him for some time ; and she consoled him or asked his advice with the air of having an interest only in his existence because of the time spent with her in innocent and vaguely clandestine intimacy. Hearts then opened with greater freedom. Confidential secrets rose to the lips, for by nature Madame de Tillières had a passion for confidences. She possessed that tender

inclination which perverted into pedantry or vanity, created the Muses and Egerias of famous men, or which, converted into holiness, transformed them into famous nuns. She was pleased to envelop in an intelligent influence the persons in whom she was interested. Love had doubled in her that delicate pleasure to which she owed the most delightful hours of her *liaison* with Poyanne. How many evenings had she spent like that in the early days of their affection, before she became his mistress, in listening to his endless story of the misery of his life! He told her of his melancholy childhood in the shadow of the old Poyanne château at Besançon, of his dead mother, and the brutal severity of his father which had soured his youth. He told of his marriage to a young girl he had long loved, his first jealousy, his shame at his own mistrust, then the evidence of her treachery—and such treachery! With the dearest friend of his youth! The hours before midnight then seemed to Juliette too short to follow this drama scene by scene, sentiment by sentiment, as he continued his story of the duel between the two friends in which both were wounded, the flight of Madame de Poyanne, the Count's despair, then his return to life by the energy of duty, his campaign in 1870 as captain, and his entry into politics. When pity had led her first of all to tenderness, and then to the entire surrender of her person, when she had become the mysterious wife of this unfortunate man, how many evenings did she recollect, when she received with the avidity of a loving comrade the story of the bold orator's day's work, giving him renewed faith in himself in times of

lassitude, arousing his prudence at the time of hidden dangers, admiring with touching enthusiasm this invincible warrior in the Conservative cause when he displayed to her, and her alone, the horizon of his projects, and the generosity of his doctrines—all that without ever exceeding her part as a woman, with a delicate caressing way of listening or speaking, which excluded even the shadow of pretension! In being like this she was not calculating; she simply yielded to her nature. Just as certain organizations have instinctively the sentiment and taste for music or painting, for mechanics or poetry, she had the sentiment and taste for the hearts of others, a charming faculty, which permits of the exercise of the rarest and most beneficent of charities, that of the soul; but it is a dangerous faculty, for it borders on culpable curiosity in sentimental experience, and in particular quickly leads to compromises of conscience and labyrinths of false situations. On the wave of a passion, for instance, how is a woman to find in herself the loyalty necessary for the nobility of a parting if she continues, being a victim of this power of sympathy, to realize the suffering of the victim she has ceased to love with love? Pierced to the soul by the bitter sensation of the chagrin she will cause, she permits herself to lie in order to avoid the infliction of this sorrow. She recoils from a confession which would be less cruel were it harshly uttered. Agonies are only prolonged by the dishonourable complaisance of their authors. Perfidy is the result of too great a tenderness. What strange irony the contradictions of the heart are, when they turn into vice our greatest

virtues and make us act wrongly because of our too sensitive natures!

These reflections upon the perils and advantages of her own character, Juliette had never formulated, though she had often said to herself: "I am very weak. . . ." or: "I ought to have spoken decidedly . . ." in connexion with some little circumstance which should have produced a precise and disagreeable "No" to some of her friends. Our character is like our health. We suffer a long time before we discover our illness. Madame de Tillières did not know why many things which gave her joy years before now made her uneasy: for example, at her evening meetings with Poyanne, when they both remained silent for ten minutes at a time, the efforts made by one or the other of them to renew the conversation distinguished most strongly the evenings of the present from those of long ago. Every time, as an explanation of this constraint, which she judged to be momentary, she discovered a reason based upon some detail. So when, on her return from the Candale's mansion, the simple phrase from the servant concerning Poyanne's presence gave her a little, almost unpleasant, start of awakening, she attributed this painful tremor to the fear that she had hurt her lover; the more so, too, when on a second glance as she was taking off her cloak, she saw the Count's footman standing in a corner of the ante-room. To her question he replied—

"I am waiting for the proofs of my master's speech, to take them to the printers——"

"It is right, then, he has made a speech,"

Juliette said to herself: "he will be angry with me for being so late. I do not as a rule show so little interest in him."

In reality this visit was rendered disagreeable to her by the need she felt of continuing the solitary reverie of her carriage, and of thinking freely of Casal, so deep was the impression produced upon her by the meeting. But how could she admit this reason for her annoyance, when she was quite persuaded that she loved Poyanne for the rest of her life? This persuasion was the honour of her fault. How often one is deluded, sometimes for years, by one's fine feelings! But an hour is sufficient to dispel the illusion. Juliette was to find that out the same evening.

"Are you angry with me, my friend?" she said as she entered the little Louis XVI drawing-room, looking pale and sweet in the mellow light of the fire and lamps. The Count was sitting at the desk where she had been writing in the afternoon. When he saw her, he got up quickly to kiss her hand, and pointing to the papers lying upon the desk said—

"Angry! You see I have no time to be angry. I was at work while waiting for you, but you will forgive me that, will you not? The House rose so late and I had the proofs of my speech to correct for 'L'Officiel' I told Jean to bring them here, and very fortunately, he added with the good humour arising from the completion of an unpleasant task, "they are almost ready. May I finish them?"

He sat down, made a few marks in the margins, then he collected the scattered sheets, put them into a large envelope waiting to receive them, and himself gave them to the footman who was

waiting in the ante-room. This business did not take ten minutes. Why was it that Juliette, who, in anticipation of having hurt her friend, had made tender and caressing advances, found herself almost wounded and at any rate disconcerted by the calm of her reception ? Truly the fault she had committed in interesting herself all the evening in Casal, quite forgetting Poyanne, was very venial as an action. It was not so, however, when the feelings of her heart were considered. Although she only imperfectly realized this, she would have liked, in her rather unjust ill humour, her lover to have acquitted her of this fault by permitting her to repair it by gentle caresses. The contrast between her mental uneasiness and Poyanne's apparent tranquillity gave her, too, a sensation of chill. Many times, especially since her love had begun to decline, it seemed to her that Henry no longer had the same transports of tenderness for her. That is the first sign and the strange mirage of a fading passion, which is not aware of its decline. We reproach these, whom we are ceasing to love, with no longer loving us as they used to do—and we do it all in good faith ! Never had Madame de Tillières experienced the feeling that there was something dead between herself and Poyanne as she did at that moment. She went to the mantelpiece, and while she held to the fire her feet in their open-work silk stockings she followed in the mirror the Count's slightest movements, as he attended, with an author's minute care, to the final details of his proofs. Why did another image suddenly interpose and replace her lover ? Why, in the light of a sort

of hallucination, did she see the man by whose side she had dined, the good-looking Casal, as Gabrielle had called him, with his strong slender figure, with his supple gestures betokening strength, with his face which was so manly in its lassitude ? Then the image of her memory faded, to leave in its place the reality. She saw once more in the mirror the man to whom she had belonged of her own choice for years. He appeared to her suddenly, and, in contrast, so clumsy and mean that this comparison gave her almost unbearable pain.

Henry de Poyanne, who was forty-five, was of middle height and slender. Naturally delicate, the fatigues of his Parliamentary life following on the hardships of his youth seemed as if they had consumed his health. His narrow shoulders were somewhat bowed by his habit of sitting at work. His blond hair was turning grey and getting thin. His complexion had become livid with the swarthy tint which indicates poorness of blood, stomach disorders, and the enervation of an entirely sedentary existence. There was something aristocratic in the lines of his almost emaciated face and body set off by his dress coat ; but there was something, too, which seemed to hint at the poverty of his nature, and his precocious exhaustion. The look in his eyes, a beautiful and loyal blue, and the haughty curl of his shaven lips were magnificent. They revealed the generous orator's sustaining force since his unfortunate childhood : reserved ardour of feeling, profound faith and invincible will power. A woman could only give herself to this man through her own good qualities, through enthusiasm for his eloquence, or a passionate desire to staunch the wounds his

destiny had caused. These were the two motives which had caused Madame de Tillières to surrender herself to him. But there is a danger in these *liaisons*, solely based upon romance, in which the mistress has yielded to intellectual admiration or sentimental pity: there always comes a time when this admiration becomes weary through use, or this pity is blunted from satisfaction. The mistress then opens her eyes. She trembles at the thought that she has been mistaken in the nature of her sentiments, but it is too late. Happy is the woman to whom this thought occurs, without any foreign motive and the charm emanating from another man being the main secret of this sudden disenchantment! But if Juliette displayed in her bright eyes, which were staring fixedly into the mirror, this spasm of the most bitter regret possible to a proud spirit, Henry de Poyanne did not notice it when he approached her—nor did the butler who brought, when her evening visitors were present, a silver tray containing a kettle, a teapot, cakes, a decanter of brandy and a jug of iced claret with the cups and glasses.

"You have been working very hard, shall I make your grog?" the young woman said as she turned to the Count with a caressing smile. Can such smiles be described as hypocritical? Their object is to spare unnecessary suffering, and those who have them on their lips would consider themselves culpable if they allowed their secret bitterness to be discovered. They do not know upon what path they start when they begin to disguise the feelings of their hearts and not let them appear upon their faces, even when only to perform an

action as insignificant as offering a familiar drink to the man they desire to charm.

"With pleasure," the Count replied to his friend's offer; and he began to watch her, as with her beautiful hands she began to pour the warm water in a ruby glass and then crushed the bits of sugar with a spoon. Her attitude was adorable as she sat near the tray, and with her pale golden hair she looked more than ever like a last-century pastel. Her beautiful arms, standing out from her sleeves, were so graceful and supple, and the harmony of her black and red toilette, with her colour heightened by the flames of the fire, was so delicately voluptuous that almost in spite of himself the Count approached her—

"How beautiful you are this evening," he said, "and how happy I am to be with you after leaving my arid and harsh politics!"

As he spoke he leant towards her to take a kiss, but she, turning her head with a slight gesture of impatience—

"Take care," she said, "you are so clumsy you will make me upset the glass."

She was engaged upon pouring into the grog some brandy at the time that Poyanne leant upon the back of her chair to kiss her. This little phrase was nothing, and there was nothing more than coquettish mutiny in the movement by which she moved her face and allowed the kiss only to brush her silky hair. But he at once drew away, overwhelmed by a painful impression, that of the lover whose mistress does not vibrate in unison with his own heart. Yes, this gesture of retreat was nothing but when such scenes of graceful rebuff

are enacted a hundred times over, the lover ends by experiencing a horrible dread of displeasing, which extinguishes the fire of his glances, contracts his heart and closes his mouth to words of love. There rested the beginning of the misunderstanding which was to separate these two beings more and more. Without reflection, obeying that instinctive diminution of tenderness she had felt for so long, Juliette too often inflicted such refusals of caresses on this man whom afterward in her own mind she accused of indifference. She went on preparing the promised drink, picked up with a fork one of the slices of lemon from a plate, and then after tasting the grog, said reproachfully—

"See, it is too strong; you caused me to fail, and now I must make you another."

"Don't go to that trouble," he replied, as he prepared to approach her.

"This time," she went on, "I forbid you to move and spoil my concoction."

"You shall be obeyed," he said; and leaning on the mantelpiece he again watched without her paying any more attention to his look than he had done just now to the expression in her eyes as she gazed into the mirror. He told himself that her turning away from his kiss was only playfulness or childishness. But it would suffice, he understood it so far, to prevent him that evening uttering a certain phrase. Letters he had received in the morning had told him that his presence was required in the country on account of a double election. It was necessary to win the two seats from his political adversaries, and supported by his eloquence there was no doubt his two candidates

would do so, and he took his mission as leader much too seriously to neglect this duty. He had come to the Rue Matignon with the object of making an appointment elsewhere than at her own house with Madame de Tillières, before his departure, to bid her good-bye, and now because of her drawing away at the approach of his kiss, he felt himself incapable of articulating his desire. This passionate timidity, even in circumstances when it did not seem necessary, would have made a hero in gallantry, Casal for instance, smile could he by any chance have learned of this interview between the Count and Juliette. It constitutes a phenomenon, if not a common one, yet frequent enough to deserve analysis as to its cause. In some men, and Poyanne was one of them, who have been pure in their youth and afterwards cruelly betrayed, an almost invincible distrust of themselves is created, and this hesitancy is evidenced by a more feminine than masculine shame with regard to the physical realities of love. Passion in them is only awakened to be accompanied by grievous anxiety, and this anxiety makes almost intolerable to them the external circumstances which allow of possession. There is nothing more unintelligible to a libertine than this half-morbid delicacy which marriage alone can abolish. Married life with its every day cohabitation and its avowed intimacy, spares these sufferers from scruples, the ever growing anguish of appointments, and, after they are obtained, remorse for the fault into which they have dragged their dear partner. After years of *liaison* Henry de Poyanne's heart beat as if it would burst when he pronounced this simple little phrase:

"When shall I see you at our own home?"

This "home" signified a very delicate nest, designed to safeguard in every possible way the most nervous susceptibilities. Juliette had yielded to him for the first time at Nançay, in the dangerous solitude of a fortnight spent there under the eyes of an indulgent mother incapable of suspicion. The young woman had given way to the irresistible movement of exalted charity, which melancholy confidences provoke in noble hearts. There is then an almost mad desire to wipe out from another soul a distressing past. She had surrendered herself in an intoxication of pity in one of those adventures which often have no future, but only when they are experienced by those accustomed to them. However contradictory this observation may appear, it is a fact that the more *galante* a woman is, the more strength she has to recover herself when once she has yielded. Juliette had considered herself bound for life by this first sacrifice. But it had been a sacrifice all the same, and Poyanne had desired that this intrigue, which he looked upon as a secret marriage, should not be soiled by any of the vulgarities which represent the horrible ransom of guilty love affairs. He had selected in Paris, to receive his mistress, a suite of apartments in one of the lonely streets of Passy, on the ground floor, with a door opening outside the porter's lodge so that there were no indiscreet eyes to be feared. He had furnished it with valuable furniture, so that on the day of their legal marriage, if that day ever came, this furniture might take a place in their home and be to them in their married life like a sanctified memory of their secret affection

of the past. But he never awaited his mistress in this nest without trembling with apprehension at the idea that a passer-by might see her as she furtively alighted from a cab at the door. Coming to visit him here, she broke no vows, as she was free. She was not deceiving a trusting husband, nor was she deserting her neglected children, but she had to lie to her mother, as the existences of the two women were so closely interwoven; and of this deceit, though very venial, the Count never forgave himself for being the cause. So enamoured was he of her charming head, of her blue eyes in which he had found the forgetfulness of his misery, or perhaps because he was attracted by the natural idealism of her soul, he suffered because of the birth of an evil thought of which he was the origin in her. These joint motives had kept this nervous lover in a state of suffering sensibility, a detail of which will be its best explanation; in the last year he and Juliette had not met half a dozen times at their nest in Plassy. The impossibility of the Count obtaining an explanation, because of his fear of hurting her feelings, the unconscious detachment of the young woman who in good faith believed herself to be less loved, the course of life, which leads us along a steady and imperceptible slope to irreparable misunderstandings, all had contributed to produce these strange relations. But perhaps they will not appear so abnormal to those who from occupation or taste have received many confessions, and who know how many different meanings the words simplest in appearance between lover and mistress can convey?

Poyanne himself cared little whether his position

with Madame de Tillières was humiliating or not to that vanity of sex which is at the bottom of the heart of almost every man. He suffered because he loved her and felt that he was getting further and further away from her. He reproached himself, brave as he was in battle and in the House, with being in this woman's presence paralysed with irresistible emotion. And, just as on this evening, his internal storm was let loose in respect of difficulties which he deemed insignificant. As on this evening nothing betrayed his trouble except a contraction of the features, in which Juliette saw traces of political trials, and he had not the courage to undeceive her. Are the reproaches of the heart capable of formulation ? Would the woman who did not guess them beforehand understand them ? If she divined them she would not deserve them. Then how could a man answer by deep complaints with groans of anguish in them a woman who came to him the dimples of her mouth shaped into a little smile, holding in one hand a little fringed serviette and in the other a warm glass, and said—

"This time I hope the grog will be to your liking. Poor friend, you look worn out. I am sure the debate was very trying. But what determined you to speak when you were so undecided yesterday ?"

"Thank you," said the Count as he half emptied the glass ; then as he placed it on the mantelshelf : "what decided me to speak ?"

His friend's question, giving him a pretext to talk of something besides his thoughts, soothed his anxiety so that he did not reply at length. He began to pace up and down the room, in the

way orators have when they are preparing a speech or rehearsing it—

"The reason I decided to speak," he repeated, "was the usual charge of egoism once more thrown at my party. No, I shall never let it be said without protest, in a French Parliament of which I am a member, that we others, Monarchists and Christians, have no right to be concerned with the miseries of the people. De Sauve asked a question upon the terrible strike in the North and the means taken to suppress it. A government orator replied using phrases which might have been expected under the ancient régime—just as if the progress of which the age can boast were not produced more rapidly and definitely, by the force of time alone, without the butchery of the Revolution, without the massacres of the Empire, without Juin and without the Commune! I said nothing more than that, and my old thesis that we alone, on the contrary, have the qualification to solve the labour question, we who lean upon the Church and the Monarchy, the two great historical forces in the country. I showed them that we could preserve everything feasible in the programmes of the advanced socialists, save it all and fashion it afterwards. But you know my views. I defended them once again, feeling my opponents tremble before the evidence of my arguments, and the applause of my party. What was the use? Ah! the writers of to-day who make it their business to depict every kind of melancholy, have never described this one; the sorrow of the orator fighting for a doctrine in which he wholeheartedly believes, to the accompaniment of the

applause of his own party, who clap him, as they would an actor or singer, though his eloquence is powerless to sow the seed of a single action. Both parties, the whole political life of to-day, believe in lobby intrigues, in sketched combinations of groups, and with them they will ruin France. I told them that, too, once more, but in vain, in vain!"

He paced up and down, discoursing upon one of those grave debates in the House, of which there had been so many since the war, and of which the empty verbiage was so disgusting. Juliette knew that the tones of his voice did not lie. She knew with what fervour of conviction he had embraced a cause upon which the future would give the final verdict, and his invincible hope of bringing about the union between the two Frances, the incomplete work of the century, by a monarchy supported at the same time upon traditional right and upon the inner sense of modern problems. She had formerly been passionately interested in these dreams of a statesman, whom she felt to be sincere, though she realized that he was not understood, and whose happiness she desired. But she was a woman, and as such, on the day that her lover began to weary her tenderness his noble ideas had begun to also bore her gracious mind. Whoever lives much in thought, artist or savant, party leader or author, possesses an infallible means of measuring the decay of his wife's, mistress' or even his friend's affection. On the day she ceases to grant him that fanaticism of intelligence, which is to the brain-worker a vital food, she secretly withdraws from him the devotion

of her heart, and is free to protest in the name of the heart against the possession of this husband, lover or friend by his professional work, as Madame Tillières did the moment the Count stopped talking.

"That is all very well," she said, "but suppose you were to think a little more of your friend?"

"Think of you?" he answered in tones of melancholy surprise; "for whose sake is it that I desire my name to be famous? From whom have I obtained the strength to bear so much bitter deception?"

"Ah!" she said, nodding her pretty blond head, "you knew how to answer. But shall I prove to you how little you thought of me to-day?"

"Prove," he said in astonishment.

"Ah well! you have not even asked me with whom I spent the evening."

"But," he naïvely said, "you wrote to me that you were dining with Madame de Candale!"

"There were others besides her," Juliette went on, a victim of that strange demon of perversity which at certain times drives the best of women to try a man's jealousy by speaking to him of another man.

"Are you angry with me for being late?" the Count asked without observing her coquettish insinuation.

"Not the least bit in the world," Madame de Tillières said, and then she went on in an unconcerned tone: "I dined this evening with a person you dislike."

"Who was it?" Poyanne then asked.

"M. Casal," she replied, watching the effect the

name of Madame de Corcieux's old lover produced on the Count's face.

"How is it that Madame de Candale knows people like him?" said Poyanne in a tone of conviction, which at once amused and irritated Juliette. She smiled because that was exactly the phrase she had used to her friend. She was annoyed because this contempt was the severest possible criticism of the impression Casal produced upon her. Then the Count went on: "No doubt her husband forced him upon her. Candale and Casal make a good pair. The latter in his existence as a bookmaker and man of the world dishonours one of the greatest names in our history."

"But," Juliette interrupted, "I assure you that I had a very agreeable conversation with him."

"On what subject?" Poyanne asked. "He has greatly changed if you managed to get a phrase out of him which did not betray his taste for gambling and racing. Come, I suffered too severely at the Corcieux's house from his conversation and that of four or five companions poor Pauline invited to keep him company."

"Did she love him then so much?" Juliette said.

"Madly," the Count went on with a strange bitterness, in which was to be found that sad severity, which a man, betrayed by his wife, maintains with regard to a story of adultery; "and the passion of that charming creature for this fop, with his air of a man who was bored by being loved so much, was always a terribly sad mystery

to me! Her husband, too, is intellectual, distinguished and well read. He adored and still adores Pauline. I ceased to visit them on account of what I saw there. I suffered too much on her account and on that of Corcieux. The poor wretch! Her punishment has been very great! Casal has been very cruel to her, it seems to me."

"He spoke this evening very tactfully," Madame de Tillières said.

"Did he even mention her name?" the Count said. "Ah! what a frightful fellow!"

There was a period of silence between the two lovers. The young woman now repented of mentioning the name of her neighbour at the dinner table. She had played with Poyanne's jealousy and she feared she had aroused it. She was too deeply sensitive not to at once regret pain inflicted upon some one she believed in spite of everything that she adored with real affection, and whom she certainly loved with the affection of habit. She was mistaken as to this man's sentiment, for it was too noble for suspicion, even after his own terrible experience of married life. In the way in which Juliette had just spoken to him of Casal, the Count had seen nothing more than a proof of the pleasure experienced by his friend in society and without him. It seemed to him a very innocent pleasure, and he reproached himself for the sentiment which made him suffer from it, looking upon it as egoism and injustice. Alas! The logic of the heart, which takes account neither of our generosity nor our sophism, showed him in Madame de Tillières increasing taste for society and new acquaintances one more sign

that he did not suffice to render her happy. But the clock struck midnight.

"Come," he said with a sigh, "it is time for me to wish you good-bye. When shall I see you again?"

"When you please," Juliette replied. "Will you dine here to-morrow with mother and my cousin de Nançay?"

"I shall be delighted," he replied; and in a troubled voice: "Do you know that on the following day I shall have to leave you for perhaps four or five weeks?"

"No," she said, "you did not mention it to me."

"There are two elections taking place, and my services will be required."

"Those horrible politics again," she said with a smile. He looked at her again with eyes in which she did not read, in which she did not desire to read, a request which this passionate man's lips could not formulate.

"Good-bye," he went on, in a still more troubled voice.

"Till to-morrow," she said, "at a quarter to seven. Come a little early."

When the door closed behind him, she remained for a long while alone, leaning upon the mantelpiece, in the mirror of which Poyanne had been reflected about an hour before. Why did the recollection of Raymond Casal return to her mind, and to what ideas was she replying when she said aloud, before ringing for her maid—

"Should I no longer love Henry?"

CHAPTER IV

SENTIMENTALITIES

WHILE Juliette slept upon this question in the narrow bed of her girlhood to which she had returned after her bereavement with all the other furniture of the happy days of her youth ; while Poyanne was returning on foot to his apartments in the Rue de Martignac, near the church of Sainte-Clotilde, reproaching himself with his ignorance of the way to please his friend as with a crime, what was this man doing whose sudden appearance between these two persons constituted, quite unknown to them, the greatest danger to the débris of the happiness of one, to the moral lassitude of the other, this Raymond Casal, who was so differently judged by men and women ? Did he suspect that at the moment instead of sleeping, his pretty neighbour of the dinner table was still thinking of him, and making a resolution to do so no more ? She had no right to do so, since she loved and desired to continue to love another. Casal had left the Candale mansion quite persuaded that he had pleased Madame de Tillières, and he went early in order not to spoil this impression. But his first movement when he reached the pavement of the Rue de Tilsitt, warmly wrapped up in his evening

cloak, after gaily breathing the fresh air, was to look at the sky full of stars, though he did not think of the delicate profile of the young widow. It was only later that he realized to what depth he had already been touched. Though very reflective, his thoughts were only directed upon external matters, and he did not know the working of his own soul. But who is there who knows himself thoroughly? who can say: "To-morrow I shall be gay or sad, tender or distrustful?" Exhausted as he was with satisfied sensuality, blasé with the enjoyment represented by youth, a proud bearing, choice friends, an income of 250,000 francs and an acquaintance with Paris, Casal ought to consider, and did consider, that he was safe from any kind of romantic surprise. His jolly childish laugh, which revealed some of his pleasant qualities, his good temper, his absence of hate, and his ready wit, would have displayed themselves, if any one had maintained that really this blasé side of his nature made him ripe for a sentimental crisis, whether deep or shallow, but still a crisis.

For a long time he was troubled by the worst of monotonies, that of a life of dissipation. There is nothing more regular, less relieved by the unforeseen, more divided among commonplace attractions, according to the time and season, than the life of a man of the world. His almost exact converse of the commonplace existence in making pleasure into a mechanical occupation, ends by becoming as monotonous as the other and for similar reasons. This satiety very often takes the form of a nostalgic sigh towards married life, for

that appears to the man of the world as delightfully original. It attracts him by the same claim of novelty which attracts a good fellow of a husband during his wife's absence to supper in a private room with girls as foolish as his wife is intellectual, as jaded as she is fresh, as venial as she is pure. But this irresistible desire for marriage as a rule only shows itself in young men who have known the joys of family life, or in those who have continued through their life of pleasure—and there are some to be found—to be good sons to an old mother, or good brothers to an anxious sister. Casal himself, who had lost his parents when very young, and was an only child, almost quarrelled over by his two uncles, had been used since his childhood to the utmost liberty, and seemed as if he ought to always remain a bachelor, as he was dark, passionate and muscular by constitution. It was hardly possible to imagine him giving way to the naïve adoration of a young girl as appears to be the custom of blasé Parisians suffering from their first twinges of rheumatism. To sum up, the natural fineness of his sensations, preserved intact in spite of his surroundings, his taste for overcoming difficulties and the need to employ his unoccupied energy, must make attractive an adventure with a person as different from his usual friends and as distinguished in this difference as Madame de Tillières was. He did not know this sort of woman. She was therefore as dangerous to him as he was to her, with this reservation, that the young widow was capable of deeper and more mortal love, whereas Casal's passion was very likely only to be a caprice, feigning love through

the intensity of desire. One cannot have eighteen years' debauchery in the blood and marrow with impunity. But, as he inhaled the evening breeze along the Champs Elysées, which he descended with the light step of a fencer, it was not even a caprice on his part, for if Juliette's image appeared to him, it was through a labyrinth of thoughts which would have made the young woman better appreciate, what her friend Gabrielle de Candale sometimes called, Poyanne's pedantry.

"A very nice evening," Casal said to himself; "if the spring continues like this, the racecourses will be in fine order this year. The dinner was not at all bad. Good dinners are coming into fashion again. It is due to us, though, all the same. If we had not been there, half a dozen of us, to tell the truth to Candale and a few others about their chef and their cellar, where would they have been even now? Now the next thing to be done is to find out how to pleasantly employ the next two hours, between ten and midnight. A club ought to be founded for that purpose alone. In the morning one can sleep, dress and ride. After lunch there is always a little business to be transacted, then from two till six is the time for love, and when there is no love there is tennis or fencing. From five till seven one can play poker. From eight till ten is dinnertime. From midnight till morning a man can play and enjoy himself. From ten o'clock till midnight it is possible to go into society, but that is too slow, or to the theatre, yet how many plays are worth seeing twice? I am too old, or not old enough, to take my pleasure in a box at the theatre."

The theatre idea directed his thoughts to a wicked but very pretty little actress at the Vaudeville, whose occasional lover he had been for the last three months. Little Anroux was the only " friend " he had at present. " But," he thought, " suppose I go and see Christine ? " He could see himself entering the door in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin, and ascending, among the strong smells to be found behind the scenes of a theatre, the staircase which led to the lady's dressing-room. Serviettes covered with powder and rouge would be lying upon the table. Two or three actors would be there chatting with their comrade. Those gentlemen would discreetly withdraw to leave her alone with a serious protector, for in spite of his good looks, he was that because of his well-known wealth, and she would begin to tell him the green-room gossip. He could hear her uttering phrases like this as she made up : " You know Lucie is with fat Arthur ; it is disgusting because of Laure." " No," he concluded, " I will not go there. I will go to the club again." The card-rooms, which would be deserted at this hour, were viewed in his imagination, with their footmen in livery slumbering upon the empty benches and hastily rising at his approach, and their nasty odour of stale tobacco mixed with the unsavoury smell of the stove. " It is really too funereal." The young man continued his meditations. " Shall I go as far as the Opera ? What is the use ? To hear the fourth Act of Robert for the five hundredth time ? No. No. No. I would rather go to Phillips'." That was the name of the English bar in the Rue Godot de Mauray. Following

a discussion leading to a duel which had taken place in the Eureka, more generally known as the old place, another bar which had been famous for the last twenty years, Casal and his friends had a split and left the Rue de Mathurins to emigrate to this tavern in the Rue Godot. If ever there is a chronicler of contemporary youth, a curious chapter in his work will be the history of the cafés and restaurants in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, and among the most curious of them, he will have to note the aristocratic wine shops which the swells were in the habit of visiting, after the theatre, to drink cock-tails and whisky in the company of jockeys and book-makers. Casal conjured up in his mind a picture of the long room with its narrow bar, its high stools, its racing pictures; and at the back the private-room ornamented with the portraits of four famous trainers.

"Bah!" he said to himself, "at this time in the evening I shall find no one there but Herbert with or without his serviette!"

This Lord Herbert Bohun, the younger brother of one of the wealthiest of English peers, the Marquis of Banbury, was a terrible consumer of alcohol, whose hand sometimes shook, though he was only thirty, like that of an old man. He had made himself famous by the astoundingly simple words he used to confess his fearful passion. He always replied to the inquiry: "How are you?" "Very well, thank you. I am enjoying an excellent thirst." He believed he was using a phrase similar to that other one: "I am enjoying a good appetite." His great pleasantry, which

was only half a joke, consisted, when dining with intimate friends, of putting a serviette round his neck, in order to lift his glass to his lips without spilling the liquor, so shaky was his hand. He held one of the ends of the serviette with his left hand, and the other with the right hand which held his glass, and the left hand pulled till the holy alcohol reached the drinker's lips.

"But," Casal thought, "it is too late now. He will not know me. Certainly, what I ought to have for this time is a fashionable mistress, a widow or a woman separated from her husband, who hardly ever goes out and who would be certain to be pleased to see me."

This strange monologue had taken the reasoner to the heart of the matter. Then only he remembered his neighbour at the dinner table and said to himself in an undertone, "Little Madame de Tillières would suit me well. Who can her lover be?" Really this formula was very disrespectful, and it concluded a series of ideas, which transcribed in detail would have appeared even to any one less naïve than Poyanne, terribly positive and cynical. It had already made the young woman's delicate picture wither. But an embryo of sentiment was at work beneath this phrase, and this proves that every one's heart is a small universe apart, where the most unromantic of words can serve as a pretext for the birth of a romantic emotion.

If Casal had not in an unconscious fashion come under the delicate charm which emanated from Juliette, just as an imperceptible and intoxicating aroma is exhaled from a plant in the corner of

a room, he would not have felt to the same extent the sensation of repugnance at the recollection of Christine Anroux's vulgarity. He had given himself excellent reasons for neither going to the theatre nor the club, but they would have had no more influence upon his mind that evening than they had other evenings, if he had not felt a secret desire to be alone. But why ? If not to think for a while of his neighbour of the dinner table, whose recollection had suddenly come into his mind and in a second effaced all thoughts of dressing-room, club and bar. Her fine silhouette was impressed upon his mental vision with wonderful clearness. Sportsmen, who live a severe physical life, end by developing the senses of savages. They possess in a surprising way that animal memory, found in farmers, sportsmen, fishermen, and all those who gaze much at objects and not their signs. Forms and colours are impressed in these minds, which are ceaselessly in the presence of real and concrete impressions, with a relief which indoor workers and drawing-room gossips do not suspect. He could see again the slender rounded grace of Juliette's bust, her souple shoulders, her black corsage with its red bows, the voluptuousness of her neck, her hair of such a soft blond, the sombre sapphire of her eyes, her sinuous lips, the gleam of her teeth in the dimple of a smile, her nervous hands and arms, even the dining-room, with its tapestry, and the pale or red faces of the guests. Had Madame de Tillières been there, alive, in his presence, he could not have distinguished her features with greater precision. This picture resulted in his half ironical reasoning

upon the employment of his evening, at once giving way to an impression which was still very brutal but at least frank and natural, the sensual desire for this pretty creature whom his instinct foretold him was voluptuous and passionate beneath her cloak of chaste reserve.

"Yes," he went on, "who is her lover? It is quite impossible for her not to have one." Then suddenly the moral memory coming to complete or interpret the physical memory, he went on: "After all she looked at me with very critical eyes after at first appearing not to notice me. That dinner was arranged between her and Madame de Candale. They are intimate friends. Then perhaps my neighbour desired to meet me. I have manœuvred very well. That I am certain about. Now what does that curiosity mean? Has she heard another woman talking about me? Has she heard her lover talk about me? After all, perhaps she has no lover, and is bored with her retirement. She is seen so little in society. She must live a very retired life. She is very pretty. Suppose I make love to her? I have nothing very interesting in hand this spring. It is a good idea. But where shall I find her? I have dined next to her, so I can always pay her a visit instead of simply sending my card."

He was so pleased with the idea that he laughed aloud for a minute: "That is it," he went on, "but then I must call upon her to-morrow. To-morrow? What have I on to-morrow? To the Bois in the morning with Candale. Good! He can give me the information I require. I lunch with Christine. That engagement can be

broken. I have been lunching too much this year, and it spoils the day. I will desert Christine and at two o'clock call upon the little widow. At four o'clock I have a bout with Lérçkew. Those left-handers are very tricky! Shall I simply go to bed now? It is half-past ten. It is very early, but for a week I have not been to bed before four in the morning. I must be in good form."

On making this wise resolution, he cut through the Rue Boissy d'Anglais, without stopping either at the *Imperial* or his club, and made straight for the Rue de Lisbonne, where he lived in a house he had inherited from his father which was as completely equipped as if he kept up a large establishment. There is at the back of the extraordinary health of these libertines a hidden fund of hygiene. Those who despise that law quickly disappear, and those who survive, the men who astonish successive generations by their indefatigable activity in the chase, play, fencing and elsewhere have retained, like Casal, the ability to look after themselves during this life of continuous dissipation. It is sometimes a monastic sobriety of the morning which corrects the too good dinners of the previous evening; sometimes it is a rest judiciously taken at the exact hour when one becomes jaded; sometimes it is a well-chosen selection of suitable exercises, the daily presence of the masseur, a regular system of home treatment. So the next morning when Raymond got up about eight to go into the bath-room and thence into his dressing-room, he was marvellously refreshed and composed by an unbroken night's sleep.

Casal's dressing-room was famous among men

about town because of what the young man jokingly called his two book-cases, although he had a real library full of well-chosen volumes. The dressing-room book-cases were glass cases, one of which contained an admirable collection of English guns of all sorts, and the other an astounding collection of boots and shoes, seventy-two pairs altogether, adapted to every conceivable form of sport, from running shoes to wading boots, without mentioning polo and climbing outfits. Not infrequently young swells came at that time to assist at the toilette of this leader of fashion and gaze in wonder at this strange collection. But the morning after Madame de Candale's dinner, he had no company but his valet, as he gazed at himself in the mirror of the triple wardrobe, which contained his clothes and completed the furnishing of the room. In spite of the elaborate equipment which made this corner of his house the typical bachelor's quarters of a Parisian swell of the year of grace, 1881, a sportsman and athlete, Raymond was not a snob. If he had in his early youth centred his pride upon the puerilities of extreme luxury, he had ceased to think of it for years in contradistinction to his colleagues in the profession of men of society ; and if he looked at himself in the glass this morning after he was dressed, it was in memory of his project of the previous evening. He was much nearer forty than thirty. At that age a man has begun that first little surveillance over himself, which ten years later will develop into mistrust, and twenty years later, if it is not disarmed, into artifice. It is quite possible that he found himself still able to please, and it

is certain that his resolve to pay a visit to Madame de Tillières that day had not departed with sleep, for before mounting his horse he scribbled a note addressed to Madame Christine Anroux, 83, Avenue de l'Alma, in which he cancelled his lunching engagement, and it was humming a popular air that he started for the Bois, mounted upon a chestnut cob, with a fine action, though not very fast, which he had name Boscard. This word, which is a slang term for a professional parasite, served as a malicious epigram concerning the friend who had sold him the horse, a Vicomte de Saveuse, a man of noble birth, but of more than indelicate behaviour, who had managed to make him pay twice as much for the animal as it was worth. Saveuse had, too, the pernicious habit of borrowing off his neighbours, when at play, amounts of twenty-five pounds, which he never returned. Casal revenged himself for this frequent imposition and also for the little vexation of being bested in his bargain by the name he gave the poor beast.

Boscard broke into a trot at the entrance of the Bois, where the thickets seemed as if they had been sprinkled with light green and were delightful to see on this early spring morning. If the animal was not very fast, it was exceedingly quiet, and the fact of Casal ordering it that morning showed that he was disposed to dream. When chance, or what we call by that name from our ignorance of the hidden powers which dominate existence, is concerned in the bringing together of two persons, it multiplies the circumstances so as to justify the credulity of presentiment. But logic

suffices, at least in appearance, to explain all facts. If it was quite natural for Casal some day to be introduced to Madame de Tillières it was none the less so that he should meet in the Bois at this hour not only Candale, with whom he had made an appointment, but also Mosé, Prosny and Madame d'Arcole, and still quite as natural that these people should have noticed on the previous evening the inattention of the Marquise after the young man's early departure and gaily joke about it. At all times men and women of the world tease one another in that way without attaching any importance to it, and Casal knew the value of this sort of gossip, which was simply an excuse for talking. In this particular case the chatter too strongly supported his own observations of the previous evening for him to neglect to pay attention to it. First of all Prosny, galloping along a cross avenue without slackening the pace of his spirited horse called out—

"The little lady was not pleased yesterday, after your departure, she was not pleased."

Then at the bend of the road Mosé stopped the horseman with a pronounced salute. He was, according to custom, on foot, struggling against incipient diabetes and practising the walking cure with that strength of will which is one of the most characteristic traits of the Jews and Yankees. These two human races, the most headstrong in the world, and best known on account of their recent advent to fortune, have, as a common trait, the will power which is found in small and great alike and is never wearied by defeat. It is not a rare thing to see a Jew and an American make for them-

selves in fifty years quite a new destiny, even to the extent of acquiring fresh tastes, by deliberate and continuous personal application. The Jew possesses in addition the special gift of never failing to notice details, however trifling. In this way Mosé, who had quarrelled with Casal and been reconciled, hastened to seize the opportunity of rendering him a slight service by bringing him news which might perhaps be agreeable to him.

"How early you left last night!" he said.

"I had a friend waiting for me at the club," Casal replied. The penetration of Mosé's fine eyes already made him feel uneasy, and decided him on this lie.

"You carried away the attention of all the ladies," the other one went on. "Madame de Candale talked to her sister in a corner, and after you had gone no one had any interest for Madame de Tillières."

A quarter of an hour later, as Casal was thinking over this information, he met Madame d'Arcole driving her pair of ponies. With the end of her whip she signalled him to stop, and when he was close to her carriage—

"What do you think of my sister's little friend? Really pretty, is she not? Yet you left her to go God knows where. You clumsy fellow!"

She had, as she restarted her smart turnout, a smile on her lips and in her eyes which, translated in plain language, meant: "If you are not a fool, Casal, you will pay court to your neighbour of last evening, and you will succeed." Even in this form it was somewhat ambiguous advice. But instinctively the Duchess did not care much about

Juliette, whom she thought came between her sister and herself—entirely because she adored her only sister—and certainly would not have been annoyed at being able to say to Gabrielle: "Ah well! Your irreproachable friend is flirting with Casal." To complete the latter's conviction that his judgment had not been mistaken, when at last he met and was riding by the side of Candale, the latter said to him with that coarse laugh which betrayed his German ancestry—a Candale had married in Wurtemberg on emigration—

"Good gracious, it went off better than I expected last evening. The little widow is a bit of a prude. Madame Bernard pretends that the late de Tillières killed himself through ennui from marrying her. I was afraid of you. But you were perfect. She seemed vexed, too, that you had gone."

"Who is it?" Raymond asked.

"What do you mean? She is the widow of de Tillières, the aide de camp of General Douay."

"I don't want to know that. Give me some particulars about her?"

"Ah! She is very ordinary and goody-goody. She lives with her old mother in a house as mournful as a tomb. She is the same sort as my wife; so you can judge for yourself."

Candale's wit consisted of launching miserable epigrams against the exquisite creature in whom he forgave neither the benefits he received from her, the fortune she had surrendered for his fancies, nor the outrage of the shame he inflicted upon her by returning to his mistress shortly after his marriage and scandalously advertising the fact, He added, after enjoying his own words—

"Does she please you so much then? Would you like by any chance to marry her?"

That was enough to stop Casal asking him the question which was already on the tip of his tongue as to the young woman's address. "He would be sure to go and talk at Madame Bernard's," he thought. "Besides, I can find the address in the directory." He was so impatient that he cut short his ride, being the victim of a little excited expectation very rare in him. When he got home his first action was to open one of those aristocratic directories, in which, by taking a subscription, the most snobbish of the middle classes have their names inserted among the nobility and millionaires with their street and number, as authentic members of high society. The name of Madame de Tillières was not to be found in it.

"I cannot ask any one who was at dinner last evening," Casal said to himself; "their curiosity is already awakened."

Really this attention showed that he had interested his neighbour at the dinner table too much to give up the idea of his visit. But if he had not been more interested in her than he realized he would have postponed his visit, and waited to profit by luck, a conversation with Madame de Candale for instance, in finding out this desired address. Instead of that, he could not help sending his footman to ask the Countess' lodge-keeper. "That is the best way," he thought. "The porter will think the question quite an ordinary one." But a little detail will show what a place Madame de Tillières' image already occupied in the thoughts of this young man with very sensitive fibres, for the

idea of comment between the two servants was so unbearable to him, that he gave his messenger three other quite unnecessary commissions in the neighbourhood of the Arc de Triomphe, so that he might carelessly say : " And as you will be near the Candales' house, call at the lodge and ask the address of Madame de Tillières. Shall you remember the name ? " By the aid of this childish ruse, which would have very much amused his friends at Phillip's, had they suspected it, he at about two o'clock' rang at the gate in the Rue Matignon, where Gabrielle de Candale had taken refuge the day before. The carriage accident was already bearing fruit.

" This is where she lives, then," he said to himself as he crossed the old courtyard towards the glass screen. The porter had told him that Madame de Tillières was at home. The young woman never shut her door to any one from motives of the same distrusting prudence which made her receive all her friends very late in the evening. She took every step to avoid even the slightest gossip among her servants. Besides, as she knew very few people, as she was in the habit of making separate and exact appointments with her intimate friends, and as she never uttered commonplace phrases of banal invitation, this freedom of entrance was hardly ever inconvenient. The facility of access completed Casal's delight.

" She has nothing to conceal," he thought as he rang at the double red-curtained door. " If she should be alone," he added to himself as the footman conducted him through the large drawing-room to the small one which had been the scene

the previous evening of Poyanne's tirade against him. When he entered, he saw at a glance Madame de Tillières reclining rather than sitting in a long chair like an invalid, in a négligée of white lace which still further refined her beauty. Near her, sitting upon a low lounge, and talking in undertones, although they were alone, was d'Avançon. Casal and the old diplomat were acquainted at their club where the latter often went to display himself as an old swell and listen to the latest scandal. The young fellows of the Rue Royale laughed at him, because he was always complaining of the bad manners of the day and saying that the young men of that day took their pleasures very sadly. At the age of fifty-six, as he was then, d'Avançon was as impressionable where women were concerned as he had been at twenty-five. He was the sort of man who did not smoke after dinner so as not to leave the drawing-room, the man one finds, on reaching the drawing-room, enjoying the delights of a private conversation with the woman one most desires to approach. He talks with that quiet voice which does not permit a word to be overheard. If he is installed in the house, which you have visited in the hope of a *tête-à-tête*, you can stay, and continue to stay. You could not make him leave the place. You could not tire him out. The d'Avançon, for he is a type, adores *liaisons* and all their little duties, so painful to the positivism of the real generation, from visiting to carriage drives to make purchases. Women have an infinite taste for these grey-haired adorers, very often disinterested in their worship. Husbands are grateful to these voluntary

watch-dogs for their harmless assiduity. Lovers abominate them, and so do those who aspire to that title. So Casal's first thought was to mentally consign to the devil Madame de Tillières' attendant, though he did not suspect that the young woman particularly appreciated his devotion without any display of disappointment to old Madame de Nançay when she was out.

"What a pity!" he said to himself. "I know him, the old nuisance. He is quite bullet-proof. Well, this is a wasted visit."

"Casal here?" d'Avançon thought to himself. "I will keep him in good order." But as he shook hands with the new-comer, his surprise was so great that he could not help saying aloud: "What, dear friend, do you know this rascal, and have never mentioned the fact to me?"

"I had the honour of being introduced to Madame de Tillières at Madame de Candale's," Casal said, answering for the lady d'Avançon was addressing. He realized, on looking at Juliette's face, that for a moment she was unable to speak, so great was her surprise at his unexpected appearance. This evidence compensated at once for the vexation the other man's presence had caused him. He no longer needed to search his memory or question Prosny Mosé, Madame d'Arcole or Candale. So great and sudden was her confusion that she had blushed up to the roots of her fair hair, and what an extraordinary symptom of agitation that is in a society woman, in whom the constant mastery of herself is a professional virtue, just as is courage in a soldier! Would they live if they were not used to always

concealing their sensations, more closely watched, as they are, by malignity than the eyes of an accused person by the magistrate who is investigating the case ? But she had since the previous evening spent hours in such anxious reflection that her unstrung nerves had not at that moment all their energy at the service of her will. After answering her own question about Poyanne and their relations sometimes by : "No, I don't love him any longer," and sometimes by : "No, we don't love each other now," she had descended to the bottom of an abyss of infinite sadness. There are at the end of a love affair periods of overwhelming melancholy, when we measure and touch the limits of the misery of life in verifying in ourselves the ruin of sentiments upon which the whole future of our heart depended. Then it is out of the despondency of heart that a desire to die comes. Our distress during which the wounds of the past reopen and bleed with those of the present, makes us declare that if all our joy has departed, none of our sorrows will ever be entirely swept away.

During the night, while Casal was sleeping like a child, while Poyanne was overwhelmed with grief, Juliette had shed bitter tears upon the pillow of her little bed, the scene of her innocent and happy girlish dreams. But why through her tears, and at the bottom of this abyss of despair into which she had sunk, did she continually see the image of the young man who without a doubt was doing anything rather than thinking of his neighbour at the dinner table ? At least she thought so. Why in the sleep into which she fell

through sheer weariness towards morning, did she experience the coming and going of dreams traversed by the same image ? If a true moral director had received her confession on her awakening, he would have enlightened her as to the secret cause of her melancholy and dreams. It is quite certain that if our dreams do not in any way predict the future, their significance is not to be neglected either by the moralist or the doctor, both of whom find in them information concerning the unconscious parts of our beings. A few facts scientifically established demonstrate it. A man dreams he has been bitten on the leg. A few days later an abscess appears upon that same leg. Animal nature had felt itself touched in him before there was anything external to show it. In the same way Raymond must have produced a much keener impression in Juliette than she realized, for his image to have been mixed in all her thoughts since she left the Candale's house. But what terms are there sufficiently delicate to explain to a woman of her refinement the real character of this impression ? Was it possible that Casal, the notorious libertine, the famous man of the world, had awakened in her by his presence alone an obscure tremor of desire and pleasure.

In spite of her marriage, which was almost immediately so tragically severed, in spite of her *liaison* with Poyanne in which the gift of her person had an idea and a sentiment as its motives, Juliette retained that virginity of sensation, which is a phenomenon so well known in all women, that it serves as an excuse for their most frequent untruth. There was in her a

sleeping lover to whom had spoken this man, who evidently corresponded with her *beau ideal* of the senses though the type varies with every nervous system. For certain the priest would have warned her against any further meeting with a man dangerous enough to immediately become a cause of obsession at the moment she felt herself detached from him who for years had been her strongest moral support although it was a support in misdoing. But during those years and because of that fault Madame de Tillières no longer went to confession. Of her ancient piety there seemed to have remained nothing but stifled remorse and the invincible hope in the goodness of God, which is the marrow of all religious faith. She therefore had nothing to guide her in her hours of danger but her solitary reflections, and her determination never to sink in her own eyes. So on the day following her night of torment, and because of that fault, when she awoke with a he dache, she clung to the idea, which, without understanding the real reason of her disorder, represented to her the safeguard of her dignity : to lavish, even in the decay of her love, all her solicitude on the lover whom she looked upon as her husband.

"I will hide from him the fact that I love him no longer," she said to herself, "and I shall not suffer, for he does not love me as he used to do. But affection and esteem are worth living for and being satisfied with, even if they do not constitute real happiness."

She afterwards prayed, as she had continued to do every morning and evening, though she was

cut off from the Sacraments and knew herself to be without the pale of the Church, with pious fervour and in that way had reached a state of the calm of exhaustion, the comfort of which she was enjoying as she listened to the gossip of d'Avançon, when Casal's entry had surprised her with a shock this time so violent that she could not at once master her feelings nor conceal her emotion. But it was all over in a flash, and she with a graceful motion raised herself into a sitting position; she had rearranged over her feet the train of her long dress, and she answered Casal when he asked her as he seated himself—

"You are not well, madame?"

"Yes," she said, "I have a slight headache this morning. I hoped that it would go away about midday, but on the contrary it seems to be getting worse."

She picked up, as she spoke, a bottle of salts from a little table by the side of her long chair and slowly inhaled it. That was as much as to say to the visitor: "You see, sir, you must not stay long." But what did he care about the coolness of his reception as long as he felt that he was an agreeable visitor?" What mattered to him the obvious ill temper of d'Avançon who was standing near the mantelpiece considering through his eyeglass with impertinent attention the index of a review lying there. Casal had just surprised the most striking proof that he interested the young widow, even to the extent of disturbing and almost terrifying her. Is there any confession more flattering to the vanity of men and more irresistibly

seductive ? The blush followed by pallor, and after the gracious amiability at the dinner table, this sudden retreat without the possibility of any new fact arising, were all signs which the young man gathered and received with delight. Perhaps if he had found in this little drawing-room in the Rue Matignon, now lit up by the bright midday sun, a gay laughing woman ready to go out and talking of the last play at the François, of the next race-meeting, and the latest separation, he would have thought with a sigh : " Well, they are all the same. It is not worth the trouble of changing." But the atmosphere of semi-seclusion around Madame de Tillières which he had breathed at his entrance, the enigma of the character of this woman, in whom the previous evening he had proved a strange curiosity for his acquaintance and whom he now found overcome with the acquaintance and resolved to shun it, and even the resistance, which he had just encountered, all appealed in the strongest degree to his caprice as a blasé man of the world. The animal of action which he was by birth and which was bored by idleness, vibrated in him with the same tremor as at the school of arms when a fencer of a fresh style crossed swords with him, or in the past in India at his first tiger hunt. But Juliette had begun one of those objectless conversations which have decided so many authors, both dramatists and novelists, to war against the gossip of the world. These conversations would be very vain if their object was not to mask thoughts which could not be expressed without rendering impossible certain forced and delicate relations.

"How beautiful Madame d'Arcole was last evening!" the young woman said.

"Very lovely," Casal replied; "and how white suits her!"

"It was her revenge for the other day," d'Avançon interrupted as he closed the review, took off and carefully put away his glasses. "You remember, dear friend, how yellow and faded she was, when we met her at the Exposition in the Rue de Sèze? By the way, when shall I come and take you to see the tapestry we were talking about."

"Go on, my good fellow," Casal thought while the ex-diplomat went on describing the tapestry, indicating the place it could occupy in the drawing-room, and alluding to various other shopping excursions, "go to a lot of trouble to make me feel that I am in the way, and that you are her intimate friend. That will not prevent me coming here again. You, too, madame, would like me to think that you are absorbed in what your friend d'Avançon is telling you. Unfortunately I am quite sure that this attention, like your supposed headache, is a little comedy, and you are very pretty, with your way of putting your finger upon your temples as if you were really bad, very bad!"

He, however, interposed with a word here and there, displaying as at the dinner table the night before the master quality of his mind: the correctness of his intelligence. Although he had hardly ever bought nick-nacks except to make presents of them to ladies of his acquaintance, and had in his choice of them consulted friends

who were authorities in these things, he had the malicious pleasure of correcting one or two of d'Avançon's errors upon the marks on china.

"Are you a collector, too, Monsieur Casal?" Madame de Tillières asked.

"Me," he said laughing, "not a bit in the world. But friends of mine have been, and I have listened to them."

"A collector?" said d'Avançon. "That shows you have only known him for twenty-four hours, dear friend!" He went on with an irony which completed the revelation of his anger at Casal's presence, that strange annoyance so often found in men of fifty, who would not like to say they are jealous of a friend, but are so all the time, without having a right to be angry, and with childish violence: "No; you don't know the young man of to-day, if you think him capable of engaging in anything but fashion and sport! This one, you see, is intelligent. I have known him from his boyhood. Yes, he appeared at the club for the first time as I was about to start for my mission to Florence. He was gifted. He sketched, played the piano, and spoke four languages. You have seen what a memory he has. Ah, well, if you could hear him, as I have done, talking to his friends: 'Will Farewel or Levarot win to-morrow at Auteuil? What champagne did you have at dinner this evening? Was it the extra dry? Machault had a bout with Wérékiew the left-hander. Were they well-matched? Who is holding the bank to-night? Who is looking after Gladys Harvey now, or Blanche de Saint Cygne?' Nothing else, madame, nothing else can be got out of them."

While the old diplomat uttered this tirade in a tone rendered all the more comic, because in his raging hatred he preserved that courteously affected manner of the men of his profession, Juliette could not help directing an uneasy glance at Casal. The latter was too fully occupied in studying the shades of feeling upon her charming face not to read in this look an instinctive fear that he was annoyed. He would, on the contrary, have willingly thanked the jealous man who was doing him the service of exciting the young woman's sympathy on his account. What better opportunity could he desire for a display of tact than by refraining from taking offence at this bitter criticism, so uttering a gay laugh he said, as soon as d'Avançon had finished speaking:

"He is too bad!" But as he got up to say good-bye, he touched the old beau upon the shoulder with a gay familiarity which was the most gracious and severe reply possible to him, as it was treating hi like a great baby, and said: "Now don't say too much evil of me to Madame de Tillières after I have gone, and, madame, do not believe all he says."

"I would bet she had a scene with him about me," he said to himself five minutes later as he was walking along the Rue Matignon. That is all he will gain by his ill temper." He shrugged his shoulders. "But how am I to see her again in a little while?" Then after a minute's reflection he said to himself: "I must go to Madame de Candale's."

"You were not very polite to Monsieur Casal," Juliette was saying at that very moment to

d'Avançon; "what have you against him?"

"I?" the embarrassed diplomat replied, "nothing at all. I have no sympathy with up-to-date men of the world upon principle. But you seem worse?"

"Yes, I am," said Madame de Tillières, who was once again reclining in her long chair with her eyes half-shut; "I shall be obliged to go to bed. I shall have to be up at dinner time, for my cousin de Nançay and Poyanne are dining with me."

She was lying, for her fair head had not troubled her since her visitor had disturbed her conversation with the faithful d'Avançon; but she saw that the latter was in the mood to continue his discourse, and she did not desire to hear any more abuse of Casal. The old beau looked at her for a few minutes in hesitation, without daring to utter the phrase which was in his heart: "Mistrust this man." Instead of it, he sighed and simply said—

"Well, good-bye. I will come to-morrow to find out how you are." It was a real cause of suffering to this fine gentlewoman to think that Casal was not esteemed by her best friends, for at dinner when in the presence of her guests, her mother questioned her about the visitors she had received during the day, she mentioned the name of d'Avançon only without speaking of the other one. But as a fact Casal, whom she had resolved not to see any more, strongly occupied her mind, for she remained insensible to the farewell the Count gave her that evening before dinner. He had arrived a quarter of an hour early to speak to her in private.

"To be sure I start to-morrow morning," he had told her, "and I may be away for six weeks. I shall take advantage of this trip to complete some neglected business and reform the views of our paper there."

"I hope you will return your candidates," she replied, but she had not found a word of regret for the unhappy man. She had not read in his eyes the reproach that she could leave him like this without one of the kisses which lovers bear away as the viaticum of melancholy absence. He was still deluded enough to attribute the silence she maintained at the dinner table and the readiness with which she allowed him to go at ten o'clock with her cousin to her headache. Ah! how much more bitter would his departure have been, if he had guessed to what temptations he was abandoning her, his dear and only friend, the woman he loved so deeply without knowing how to show his love.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST FAULT

IN thinking of Madame de Candale as a possible auxiliary in his project of investing Juliette's heart, Casal counted first of all upon Gabrielle's sympathy, which he knew he had gained, and afterwards upon the irresistible taste which drives all romantic women into interesting themselves in sentiments which they believe to be naïve or unfortunate; and he would not have much difficulty in acting the comedy of one of these sentiments. But would it be a comedy? In spite of the assurance he felt now after his visit that he interested Madame de Tillières, in her presence he found himself in a state of uncertainty, which extended through the whole afternoon following his visit and troubled him almost to the extent of alarming him. While fencing with Wérékiew he had two or three periods of distraction which astounded the admirers of his skill. At dinner with two friends he had met at the club and taken to the Café Anglais as company for himself, he was very silent, and still more melancholy at an acrobatic display, whither his friends dragged him. To the frequenters of Phillips' where he drifted about midnight, he seemed so spiritless that they inquired after his health.

The nearer the time came for him to call upon

Madame de Candale to talk to her about her friend, the more obstacles he perceived between that friend and himself, and it was with an actually beating heart that he entered the house in the Rue de Tilsitt less than forty-eight hours after he had dined there, and twenty-four hours after calling upon Juliette. This kind of timidity in a man used, as he was, to all sorts of triumphs, this sudden and completely unexpected bashfulness, would please Gabrielle and make her favourable to his cause. But there was in the young Countess, to make her well disposed towards Juliette's admirer, another sentiment upon which Casal had not reckoned, a strange aversion to Henry de Poyanne; and the aversion played in this mundane drama too important a part for no effort to be made to assign a reason for it. Here is a case of a thousand of that problem of friendship between women which has pre-occupied, even if only for an hour, every mistrustful husband and jealous lover.

Gabrielle de Candale, let us begin by saying in praise of the beautiful descendant of the great marshal, had a very real affection for Juliette de Tillières. They had met when quite young girls at a ball at a country house, one of those gatherings where the old French nobility foregather. Nançay and Candale, both situated on the banks of the Indre, became from that time neighbours though twenty-five leagues apart. The war of 1870, by isolating the two women on their estates and striking one of them so cruelly, had drawn them more closely together. Then Gabrielle had confided in her friend the unhappy secret of her life. She had wept with Juliette in her turn, as Juliette

had wept with her. This sweet exchange of pity had forged between these two equally generous and tender beings an unbreakable chain, made of the purest metal of devotion. With that, though adoring her friend in such a pretty way, so completely delicately and disinterestedly, Gabrielle detested her friend's sentiment for Poyanne through a complicated byway of the heart. Yes, she detested him, because the other woman had never spoken in a straightforward way about him.

Without going so far as to suspect of a guilty *liaison* her dear sister by election, she realized that between Juliette and this man were very intimate relations, more intimate even than she could perceive. She told herself that Poyanne loved Madame de Tillières and that Juliette on her side was not insensible to this love. Without doubt had the Countess been initiated into the guilty but noble romance by one or the other of the two accomplices, she would not have nursed this antipathy for relations which she believed to be pure, though their mystery irritated her, and she was jealous of them in a double sense. First it was a jealousy of friendship. Who does not know this innocent and shadowy susceptibility of the heart, which is so natural that even animals feel its influence? Intrude upon your pet dog another and share your caresses between them; and you will see a sample of it.

Afterwards there was the jealousy of envy. Certainly the noble creature would have protested with indignant anger against the existence in herself of this passion which is the lowest and most detestable of all to a lofty mind. Alas, it is as well the most

skilful in insinuating itself into the dark recesses of the conscience, it is the least admitted and at the same time most general. For its origin rests in that which essentially constitutes us social persons, our resemblance to other individuals. Envy, also, is exasperated by a multitude of analogies. Never does the poorest artist envy a millionaire as he does another artist, almost as poor as himself.

Now imagine two women, both pretty and young and blessed by all the benefits of birth and wealth; suppose them to be united, as Juliette and Gabrielle were, then suppose that one of the two experiences and feels a love which is returned while the other remains imprisoned by the fatality of events and by her principles in the sorrows of an unhappy marriage. Afterwards say if envy is not at the door of the isolated woman's soul however generous she may be. At first it will be an obscure malady, an instinctive and inexplicable antipathy to the man who unknown to himself inflicts upon her the sorrow of this comparison between herself and her friend. She will soon try to justify this antipathy in herself by ascertaining his faults. She looks at him with hostile eyes which would discover sensuality in a Marcus Aurelius and egoism in a Vincent de Paul. Madame de Candale had in this way recognized in Henry de Poyanne an excessive personality, simply because the great orator, haunted by his ideas and obsessed by his work, talked a little too much about politics. She accused him of tyranny, because many times Juliette had refused an invitation to one place or another in order to pass an evening, or dine with him. She came to the conclusion quite

in good faith that this marriage, if it ever took place, would be a misfortune for Madame de Tillières.

Gabrielle was none the less convinced of her esteem for Poyanne. "I admire his talent. I appreciate her straightforwardness. I do not like him, that is all," she would add with a smile. Only, like Juliette, who in her desire to maintain profound peace around her, restrained herself from communicating such criticism to her lover, the latter did not in any way suspect what an enemy he had in the beautiful countess. He on the other hand appreciated in her the qualities of breeding, irreproachable honour and enlightened religion. He pitied her for being married to such a vulgar person as Candale. He felt that she was the devoted friend of Madame de Tillières to whom he said: "She has a real affection for you."

When these delicate proceedings do not disarm those who are hostile to us, their immediate result is to increase the hostility. Every moralist has noticed this melancholy law in our nature, that the things we pardon least in others are our wrongs to them, especially when these wrongs are not very clear and when we feel them rather than are able to identify them. If Madame de Candale had seen Poyanne frankly declare himself her enemy, his hostility would have displeased her less than did the Count's continual deference. She went so far, on her worst days of injustice, as to consider him, this time without saying so, a hypocrite. Who knows? Perhaps the soul, which was deceived and almost crucified by the moral wickedness of her husband, suffered from a further com-

parison still: that of the great idle and brutal noble, whose name she bore, with a hardworking, eloquent, and genial gentleman like Poyanne.

Is there anything further required to explain the reception Casal's attempt was likely to meet from her? See her sitting at her table in a room, half boudoir, half drawing-room, where she received her intimate friends beneath the bust of the Marshal carved in marble by Jean Cousin the French Michael Angelo. She was clearing off the arrears of her correspondence, that daily flow of letters of sympathy or charity for which women of her rank ought to find and always do find pretty unpublished formulae. She had ordered her carriage for half-past two. It was two o'clock. The bell rang. It was a tradesman. There was a second ring. It was a visitor: "I ought to have said I was not at home," she said as she put down her pen and awaited the arrival of the unexpected caller. "What," she said quite loudly, "is it you, Casal? What luck!" but to herself she went on: "Why has he come to see me, for he is a man who never pays visits?" All this time the young man was replying with a smile to conceal his vague embarrassment: "I had a word to say to Candale about a horse, if he wants to replace the one he lost the other day. I found out you were at home and came up. Do I disturb you?"

"No," she replied, "you don't favour me with your company very often." Then the conversation began about the horse, a pretext which had suddenly occurred to Raymond for introducing the dinner of the other evening. Madame de Candale mentioned the name of Madame de Tillières. She saw

a little flame of curiosity gleam in Casal's eyes, and guessed that a question was hovering upon his lips.

"Good," she said to herself, "I have it. He has come to talk about Juliette."

In minutes such as these a woman is really a woman, feline and charming in her adroit grace, when she discovers in conversation the interest another woman inspires in a man. She has at once a movement of curiosity which makes her lean her graceful head forward and display her attention in her deep eyes. If she is writing she puts down her pen. If she is at her desk but not writing, she picks up her pen, or a book, or her work. If she is a foreigner she smokes and lights a cigarette to disguise her curiosity. Then she interposes a phrase, a little unimportant phrase. It is then that the treacherous creatures excel in poisoning the mind and the entire future of a man's passion by one of those insinuations of which the classic, "So many things have been said," serves as a vehicle for a great many untruths. They quite quietly give you the name from a mouth, which launches the calumny with a smile, of the gentleman who has been or passes as the latest admirer of the lady of your thoughts. Then they have a—"What, you don't know that?" and a "You see you can go forward," for which they will have to account in another world if there is any place in purgatory for drawing-room felonies. On the other hand those who are good, but scent a love story with the keenness of a cat entering a room in which there is a bowl of milk, display their most caressing diplomacy in leading you along the pathway of confidences. You are only at the sighing period

You have a right to tell a secret which is then only your own, but you will regret it later. Among the ruses to open your heart, the most common but effective consists of telling you simply what you desired to tell her, of speaking aloud your thoughts. It is the most certain way for these charming inquirers to find out whether they have guessed correctly. It must be added that generally we make this inquiry easy. In that way Casal took up the name of the woman who occupied his thoughts and began—

"By the way, how is Madame de Tillières? Have you seen her since the day before yesterday?"

"No," the Countess replied; "but I don't ask you whether you have. Wild as I know you are, I would wager that you simply left your card there."

"Don't wager," Raymond went on with a laugh, "you would lose. I did better than that. I paid her the regulation call."

"Then the affair is serious," she said; "ah well! for once you are right. My friend is delightful, she is as clever as if she were not pretty, and with it she has distinction. Only, you know, she is an honourable woman. It would be a change for you to see a few of them and convince you that the species still exist. What did the two of you talk about?"

"Nothing at all," Casal replied. "I would ask nothing better than to be convinced of it. Unfortunately honourable women are more surrounded than the others. I see you occasionally alone, madame. I have not had the chance with Madame de Tillières. When I got there, whom did I find there?"

He stopped at this interrogation point. With any one else than Gabrielle, he had correctly enough calculated, when he supposed that her reply would tell him the name of Juliette's lover, if she had one. But had she one ? He had turned that problem over and over in his mind since the previous evening, and he would have spent a few minutes of real suffering if the Countess had replied with a man's name accompanied by a "naturally." But these little treasons, the small change of feminine friendship, were not in Madame de Candale's character, so she contented herself with shaking her head as a sign of ignorance.

"D'Avançon," Casal went on, obliged to reply after asking the question. "You must admit that for a first visit that was not very tempting. Besides, that old boy favoured me with a nice parcel of disagreeable things while I was there! You can understand the slaughter I had to bear with a shrug of the shoulders. Madame de Tillières will not want to see me again."

"How can that affect you ?" the Countess maliciously insinuated.

"Why," he said, "do you think it is very pleasant to pose as a sort of brute, fit to talk to jockeys, croupiers and courtesans ? On my oath it was almost in that light the old rascal presented me."

"What reply did you make ?"

"I could not get angry with an intimate friend of the hostess on my first visit, could I ? But will you be good to me ?"

"I see what you mean," the Countess resumed with another laugh; "Juliette must be told that

you are a little better than that. It is your own fault, too. Why do you never look in by accident when you are passing ? Why do you spend twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four with a band of gamblers, men of the world and ladies who expose you, demoralize you and ruin you ? You will tell me," she added, "that it is not my business."

"Ah ! madame," Casal replied, taking her hand and kissing it with a gesture at once respectful and familiar which touched the young woman, "if there were only more people in society like you."

"Come, come," she said, threatening him with her finger, "you are not flattering me for nothing. You want me to give you the opportunity to justify yourself a little in the eyes of my nice-looking friend after d'Avançon's slander, do you not ? Then pay me a short visit in my box at the opera to-morrow, Friday."

"Good gracious !" she said to herself when Casal had gone, "suppose Juliette does not accept my invitation ? How stupid I am ! She was quite put out the other evening when he disappeared after dinner. She will be delighted to see him again. Besides, where will be the harm if she does flirt a little with some one besides her politician ? At least he can marry her. But Casal marry her ? What folly ! Why not ? He is rich, well connected and so young ! Yes he is very young at heart in spite of his life and reputation. How gentle he was just now when he talked of her, almost timid ! What has that boy lacked ? A good influence. But what will Poyanne say when he hears of these two meetings so close together ? He can say what he pleases. It does not matter to me."

In spite of this reasoning and although the hypothesis of a marriage, which was after all possible, between the young widow and Raymond was hovering in her mind, the Countess was not absolutely reassured when she said to her friend on Friday evening in the carriage which was taking them to the Opera:

"By the way, I forgot. I have invited Casal to my box. You are not annoyed, are you?"

"Why should I be?" Madame de Tillières replied. She had asked the question in a slightly tremulous tone which could not escape so clever a woman and one as used to the inflections of her voice as Madame de Candale was. The latter expected a few words about Casal's visit to the Rue Matignon. But they were not uttered.

This slightly tremulous accent and her silence revealed something quite the opposite of indifference concerning a man she had only seen twice. Since his visit, as a matter of fact, she had thought of him constantly, but with profound loyalty she had forced herself to put Poyanne's image in place of that of the tempter:

"How fortunate it is," she thought," that I received him badly! He will not come again. I should have been so annoyed at having to mention him to Henry in my letters! He is so hard on the poor fellow! D'Avançon is even worse!" She remembered the old diplomat's departure, "I cannot believe they are right." Like most women who have no precise notion of the reality of vice the formula "a man of the world" only represented to her something vague, abstract and indeterminate. It signified a culpable destruction of

oneself, a mistake almost grievous because of the remorse following it. A complex attraction, for the gentle feminine mind, of curiosity, of fear and pity emanates from these dark depths of man's sin. " No, Gabrielle's view is more correct: He must have had evil surroundings. What a pity! But what does it matter? Yes, it is very fortunate that I shall not see him again. With his habits he would have tried to make love to me. Even now his visit on the day following the dinner without an invitation was not exactly the thing. I must give him his due, though, he gave a perfect display of tact while d'Avançon was indescribable. But if he had found me alone, what would he have said? A little tremor of fear seized her at the idea. " But why should I think of it? It is all over, he will not come again." Now here was her imprudent friend bringing her again face to face with the young man.

" But," she asked sharply enough," I thought you hardly ever saw M. Casal except at the big sporting dinner?"

" Quite true," Madame de Candale replied; " but he paid me a visit yesterday, and he looked so miserable."

" What about?" Juliette said.

" But did he not come and see you as well?" Gabrielle asked, " and did he not meet d'Avançon there?"

" I do not see the connexion?" Madame de Tillières said, somewhat confused at the thought that her friend knew of Casal's visit.

" It is very simple," the Countess went on. " It appears that d'Avançon behaved atrociously to him."

"You know the poor man," Juliette replied, pretending to laugh; "he is jealous. He is of men of all ages, particularly his own, and fresh faces displease him."

"At last Casal went away convinced that you had formed a fearful opinion of him, and he came to tell me. You frighten him, I am sure. If you had seen him and heard him saying to me: 'Defend me to your friend"—you would have been touched as I was. So I invited him to defend himself. I could not help it. I am interested in him, as I told you the other day. My idea is that it is a pity to leave a fellow of his worth to fall more and more into society unworthy of him. Since he appeared to listen to our opinion why should we discour age him from living a decent life? Is not that your view?"

Juliette replied by an evasive phrase. She would not, she could not betray to Gabrielle the nervous tremors which Raymond's presence caused her. Perhaps, too, she in an obscure way desired his presence, while she was trying to prove the contrary to herself, and rejoiced in a half-frightened way at the thought that she would see Casal again without its being her own fault. Then the Countesss, in trying to justify herself for inviting the young man, had involuntarily discovered the most dangerous excuse for a woman as sensitive as Madame de Tillières in that romantic pity, in that "What a pity!" which she had already pronounced to herself. It was by that path, that always open fissure in her tender heart that love had first insinuated itself, when she had pitied Poyanne's sufferings and desired to repair

their ravages. The thought that Casal was wretched because of his past life, and that a good influence might take him away from it, and the plan of aiding in this redemption, and being this influence, how tempting it all was! But the temptation was not formulated at once with that clearness in her troubled soul, whereas she at once listened to the voice of her conscience pronouncing this other little phrase."

"This time I shall not be able to conceal from Henry that I have seen Casal."

It was her custom when Poyanne was away to keep for him a diary of her life and thoughts. When she entered, with the Countess, the box, it was the latter shade of sentiment which dominated her with a feeling of distrust concerning the young man. He was there talking to Candale and d'Artelles as he scanned the house through his glasses. He had not in his eyes as he greeted her that look of defiant fatuity which says to a woman: "You see I have come to meet you despite anything you could do," but on the contrary a look of suffering. Since he had received Madame de Candale's invitation this seductor, this king of fashion, this blasé fellow had been quite unrecognizable. Instead of being relieved his uneasiness increased. He told himself in spite of his experience, "Madame de Tillières will be annoyed to see me there. She will think that I desire to force myself upon her, and however little more d'Avançon said about me, I am ruined in her eyes." This anxiety changed into real suffering when she passed in front of him to reach her seat, her eyes and face betraying just as much distant coldness as

they had confusion on the previous afternoon. For the first time the evidence of the sensation which prompted him appeared to Raymond. It was not a question now of picking up a girl at ten o'clock in the evening, nor of telling a more or less interesting tale.

"I am done," he said to himself while he watched Juliette, this evening dressed in white, as she sat down by the side of Madame de Candale who was in red. The two women as they took their seats, placed upon the little velvet ledge their fans, handkerchiefs, glasses and a bottle of smelling salts, taking stock of the other boxes the while without appearing to do so. While the singers came and went upon the stage, the orchestra quickened or lengthened the accompaniment, and while the gentlemen talked in the bar at the back, all sorts of little reflections, to which the young man was as accustomed as he was to wearing a dress suit in the evening or riding in the morning, came to him. Usually he did not notice them, but the state of his heart made him desire to obtain proof that Madame de Tillières was upon the point of quite recovering her heart, if she had not already done so. Ambroise Thomas's Hamlet was being played moderately well. The excellent artiste who took the part of Ophelia was surrounded by understudies, and in the semi-darkness Casal could hear phrases like this. "What an awful King! How could she poison her husband for such a man? Who is that in Madame de Bonnivet's box? It seems to be Machault no longer! I always wonder whether the ghost is a real actor?—Yes, his mouth moves.—Is not that little Madame

Moranes in Madame Komof's box? How pushing she is! She is very pretty.—Look at the Queen. Whom does she resemble?—I do not see.—Marie de Jardes. It is a striking likeness." Such are the usual ideas exchanged to an accompaniment of music sometimes mediocre, sometimes sublime, by the bejewelled sphinxes of the boxes, whose profiles considered from a distance awake memories of romances in the minds of two or three poor dreamers in the body of the house. At every performance at the Opera there are one or two young fellows, students, employés or country men who have saved up enough money to go there and bask in the sunshine of the fashionable world. But these madmen who are exalted by the chimera of a delicacy of soul in keeping with the faces and toilettes are not altogether wrong. With that disconcerting mobility which makes a Parisienne a continual miracle of contradiction, these same women, after chatting just as if they were in a drawing-room, suddenly concentrate their attention upon a part of the performance, and they at once find themselves attuned to the work and the ideal emotion the musician has desired to convey. In that way when the curtain rose upon the "mad" act, the Comtesse de Candale said for herself and her guests:

"Now we must listen."

Silence was established in the box. There is in the fourth act of Hamlet a divine romance the theme of which, it is said, the French composer has borrowed from a popular song of the North. The few bars of desperate melancholy ceaselessly pass and repass in Ophelia's plaint, while around

her companions come and go, dancing and singing, and it is the contrast, always poignant to the heart, of the gaiety of life carelessly displayed around a soul a prey to solitary passion and the grievous martyrdom of its internal wound. Spring among the flowers, it laughs in the sky, in the grass it makes the cowslip buds appear, and in lovers' eyes the glad tears of happiness tremble. All mouths open to salute the intoxicating feast of time and the senses all except that of the deserted woman to whom the cruel Prince has said : " Sweet Ophelia," and " Go into a convent." Through the happiness of others she sees her own irreparable misery and everything which might have been. " Ah ! " she sighs, " happy is the wife in her husband's arms ! " Her reason departs in this sigh. No, it is not possible for her to have been deceived by the Prince, her Prince, if Hamlet, her Hamlet, is still alive. Since she is alone and exhausted far away from him, he must be no longer of this world, and she walks towards the river which flows and flows, promising a bed in which all suffering is forgotten. Now leave her, all you to whom she had distributed the flowers of her bouquet with her suffering grace, let her go to this water—less deceitful than the man's heart—less moving than hope—less rapid in its course than the flight of the hours of happiness—and drown there with the memory of her lost joy, her unalterable love. " Adieu," she sighs again, " adieu, my only friend." Life may continue to laugh and dance, spring to lavish its light and perfumes, but the suffering soul is for ever free.

The strange charm of music and its particular

virtue is not to specify the symbolism it envelops. It lends itself thus to the exigences of the most distinct sensibilities. While the beautiful plaintive phrase of the romance developed and was repeated again and again, through a very clever harmonic combination, each of the persons in Madame de Candale's box felt tremble at this touching melody some inner thought in accord with the tone of that phrase. Gabrielle, who had only to turn to see her husband's mistress, Madame Bernard in the box between the columns, found in the sigh of the abandoned woman a little of the secret suffering of her own life. Juliette's resolution was weakened by invisible tears which the tenderness seemed to make fall upon her heart. Casal himself, overcome by romantic emotion for the first time for years, forgot his sallies about the "most expensive noise of all." He experienced and let himself experience a feeling of sad voluptuous trouble in listening to this air, though he knew it well, in the presence of the woman he was beginning to love. She was so close to him, with her blond hair, simply arranged at the back of her head, with her fine neck, the whiteness of which was prolonged by her low cut dress to her shoulders, with her fine profile, with the perfume emanating from her toilette, an almost imperceptible aroma of Persian lilies. She was so near and yet so far. Ah! had he only been able to speak to her at that moment, he would have known whether she had recovered her heart, whether she had entirely dominated the interest he had aroused in her at their first meeting. But the door opened and some one entered the little drawing-room at the back of

the box. The spell was broken, it was Mosé, whose hand Candale shook, and Madame de Candale got up to talk to the new-comer whom she hardly allowed time to greet Madame de Tillières.

"Come here," she said to the visitor, pointing to a place by her side, "you look as if you had some news. Come, tell me it."

"No, madame," Mosé answered with a laugh, "I have heard nothing at all."

"I can see I am in the way," Candale said, as he opened the door of the box stick in hand. He leant on the arm of d'Artelles as he added: "What a good husband I am! I am taking him away as well."

"Will she get up?" Casal thought as he was left alone with Juliette in the front of the box. As a fact at that moment, Madame de Tillières was saying to herself: "My duty is to avoid even this five minutes' half-private conversation": but she remained in her seat, pretending to again scan the house with her opera glasses. In the mirror on the wall of the box she had seen that Raymond's face was gloomy with uneasiness, and she felt at the same time similar emotion to that which she did on the first evening before this fine, proud man's face, and an irresistible tenderness because of the evident timidity which flattered her woman's most secret pride. Her nerves, still quivering from the music, made an effort difficult for her, and her heart was oppressed by an expectation she considered culpable even at the moment she experienced its secret delights, so that she did not rise. Besides the young man began to talk to her. How could she insult him by not replying, and why should she do so?

"That Act is fine," he said, "and because of it, I can almost forgive the composer for touching Hamlet: although I detest people who spoil subjects already treated by representing them in another form. This play of Shakespeare ought tó be seen in London with Irving in the title rôle. Do you know him, madame?"

"I have never been to England," she replied: and she thought: "Gabrielle is right. I frighten him." It was a sensation lasting only a few seconds, but so delicate! Casal's reserve put her own conscience at rest, and it was a proof that she was pleased with the young man who went on explaining the great English actor's reading of the part, criticizing his continuously cutting words, praising his accurate gesture and subtle intelligence. He stopped and with a smile:

"Admit, madame," he said, "that you think it is rather ridiculous of me to pretend to have artistic taste."

"Why?" she asked. A little tremor ran through her. She realized that this phrase would lead to another and the conversation would become more dangerous.

"Why?" Casal went on, "because of the sketch your friend d'Avançon gave you of me the other day."

"I did not listen to him," she said, fanning herself to hide her confusion. "I had such a headache!" —"Where will it all lead to?" she asked herself.

"Yes," Casal said with a melancholy which was only half feigned. "But one day when you do not have a headache you will listen to him and believe him. Yes, it will be either he or someone else.

As I said to Madame de Candale yesterday, it is rather hard to be always judged by a few youthful follies. Then, also it seems to me . . . May I speak quite frankly to you ?"

She inclined her head. He had put that enigmatic question with the somewhat childish grace, which is so powerful in its influence over women, when it is associated in a man with all the power of his virile maturity. He went on :

"It seemed to me that you were not pleased to see me when I called upon you. You were quite right, for you did not invite me."

"But," she said, taken unawares by this straight thrust, which she could hardly parry, "you were the person who was not pleased. I live in my corner so far retired from all that interests you."

"You see," he continued, "you listened to d'Avançon's speech in spite of your headache. Ah, well ! I should like to visit the Rue Matignon a few times at your invitation so that I can have a chance to reply to his charges. That is only justice, is it ?"

He was so fine at that moment, such gentleness beamed from his clear eyes, and this talk had been so rapid, that Juliette replied almost unwittingly :

"I shall always be very pleased to see you." It was the most commonplace phrase of all. But uttered in this way in reply to his request and after Madame de Tillières had promised herself to be so discreet, this little phrase, quite insignificant in itself, was equivalent to a first weakness. The earnest, "thank you" from Casal made her realize only too well that the young man had interpreted it in this way. She then had the courage to get up and go to the rear of the box to rejoin Gabrielle and Mosé. It was too late.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRADUAL SLOPE

WHEN Juliette had returned from the theatre and dismissed her maid before retiring for the night, she sat down at her table to write to Poyanne the account of her day. This little table, on which the many tiny ornaments evidenced a gentle minutia of mind, made a nook in her room still more her own than did the desk in the peaceful Louis XVI drawing-room. The portraits of her mother, father, husband and other dear dead friends were hanging within reach and sight upon the silk-covered wall, against which this table, a witness of her happiest days, stood. Above was a bookcase containing the volumes she read most frequently: an *Imitation*, a few poets, a few novels of tender analysis, especially by the Moralists, those who unite, as Saint François de Sales, Fénelon, and Joubert of our own time, the acuteness of observation with the delicacy of goodness. The lace-covered lamp illuminated this familiar world with a soft light, the virginal rosewood bed with its little round columns and its five or six little pillows ready for the sleeper, and the fireplace, where a flame flickered. The regular ticking of the clock was the only sound in this room which looked out upon the garden. How dear these hours of solitude were

to Juliette, for she loved to linger over her reading and particularly over her writing! She had that pretty taste for correspondence, which vanishes with our habits of haste, and between her friends and herself a continual exchange of notes was kept up, regarding the misunderstanding of a phrase in the gossip of the day, upon a book borrowed, or to be read, upon the health, or simply a commission. A thousand nothings such as these serve women as a pretext for embroidering the most graceful flowers of fantasy upon the grey monotony of daily life. With her friend of friends, the secret husband of her choice, when the exigences of politics had taken him far away from Paris, she had often had long talks by means of interminable letters, letting her pen glide rapidly over the smooth paper, and her thoughts follow the man whose ambitions in those days were the subject of her passionate devotion, and whom she admired, while advising him with that modest tact, which is a unique caress for the vanity of a husband or lover! But on that evening after the performance of Hamlet, she remained for a long time with her head in her hands before she could complete a line of the letter she desired to write. Should she tell him about Casal, his request and the reply she had given him?

"I ought," she said aloud at last, wrinkling her brow; then with a resolute motion she began to write. In half an hour she had finished a true letter in which she narrated her meeting with Raymond in Gabrielle's box and the essence of their conversation, the whole of it frankly and simply; she added that if the young man's presence at her house was distasteful to Henry, one word

from him would cause her to withdraw the invitation. After finishing the letter, she re-read it, and she could see in her mind Poyanne reading it inside twenty-four hours. She knew him too well to doubt his reply. It was part of this man's generous nature, that he did not desire, in his relations with Juliette, that his authority should intervene. He was one of those lovers who always say to their mistresses : " You are free." But they cannot help suffering, and the woman whom they permit to follow as she pleases the path of her fantasies, feels at certain times that she is trampling upon a heart. The heart bleeds without a groan, and its mute suffering rises like a tender reproach less preferable to a delicate creature than the most violent insults. In this way Juliette realized in advance the pain this clear letter would cause her friend. The scene which had followed Madame de Candale's dinner recurred to her mind with extreme clearness, as did Henry's animosity to Raymond. Convinced as she was that Poyanne's love had diminished, logically Juliette should not have taken into account an antipathy she considered unrighteous. But she still retained too much real affection for him to decide in cold blood on such a harsh proceeding.

" No," she said, " I will not send that letter. What is the use ? " She got up, and throwing the letter into the fire, she watched it burn with that feeling of unhappiness, so well known to persons who have gone through the time at the end of a *liaison* when all which was the charm of intimacy has become a grievous bore. A person does not like to give up the pleasant custom of telling the heart

story pen in hand, and cannot do so, therefore sheet after sheet is written and torn up, till there comes one which, just as Madame de Tillières did, is put into an envelope, and contains nothing but commonplace and awkward phrases. In hers the name of Casal was not even mentioned.

"I don't know why I am troubled by such a trifle," she said to herself the next morning, to allay the remorse which quivered in her. "What wrong is there in receiving a friend of Gabrielle de Candale and Marguerite d'Arcole? What excuse could I make to refuse his request to call? Gabrielle is right. He obeyed a pretty sentiment. He wished to protest against the effect d'Avançon's words must have produced on me. It was like binding himself to irreproachable behaviour in the Rue Matignon, and consequently not to make love to me. An occasional visit will tend to give him more respect for all that is good in himself. Even Henry would approve of his visits, if he knew him better, if I could explain to him by word of mouth. Besides," she went on as she re-read a letter she had that morning received from Besançon, "he hardly occupies any of my attention now." These were the pages in which Poyanne told his arrival at the home of his childhood and his interviews with a few notable electors, and were full of details of the struggle in which he was about to engage. It seemed as if he had purposely avoided the slightest sentimental allusion. This timid lover who was afraid to weary his mistress by his tenderness, had also written a first letter, then a second, and a third, and he had burned them just as she had done, sending her at last an impersonal and indifferent one.

Juliette should have been able and ought to have understood him; but we never give others the credit of thinking they are like us in the grievous susceptibilites of their hearts. She uttered a sigh and simply said:

"How he has changed! His letters of long ago were so tender."

She enclosed the sheets covered with the Count's straight and upright writing in a little leather envelope with a lock to it, bearing the date 1881 upon it. In her cult for the man, whom she rightly considered to be one of the chief personalities of the period, she had adopted the pious habit of never allowing even a note from his dear hand to be lost, and at the beginning of every year she ordered a sheath for the treasures she formerly prized so much. The sentiment of the past, that flame which seemed to have flickered and almost died out between them, gripped her heart, and she became still more thoughtful as she amused herself and employed her fingers in arranging in the vases a few flowers sent from Nice by General de Jardes, who was travelling on the Italian frontier for the great military work, the dream of his life. The rosebuds, drooping from their journey, pale narcissi, golden mimosa, red and white carnations and Russian violets mingled their perfumes. The poor blossoms, which were still alive and put in water would revive for a few days, exhaled their souls in an agony of perfume, a home-sick sigh for the sunny land and enchanted gardens of Provence. Madame de Tillières had been too deeply moved since the previous evening for the invisible caress of their perfume not to overwhelm her with strange languor.

A sadness enveloped her which brought tears to her eyes ; she wiped them away with her graceful hand almost in terror as she heard the door of the outer drawing-room open. A tremor ran through the whole of her body at the thought that Casal might have at once taken advantage of the invitation he had requested, and was about to enter to see her in a state of inexplicable unhappiness. He would question her. What should she say ? Fortunately the door on opening admitted, not the young man, but d'Avançon, and the ex-diplomat was so full of an idea, the light of which gleamed from his grey eyes, that he did not even notice the lady's pallor, her moist eyes or the trembling of her hands.

" I am sure that he will tease me about last night at the Opera ? " she said to herself after her first gasp of relief. She continued to arrange her flowers, this time almost gaily, watching the old beau out of the corner of her eye as he was obviously preparing an effort. She knew him so well ! She knew that one of this man's mannerisms was never to go straight to the point. He believed he owed it to his late profession to prepare his words as he did his face, applying cosmetic to his hair, one by one, so much so that his bald head appeared to be lacquered in black, and dying his moustache so as to preserve it a natural shade of grey. He was in the habit of using, at the beginning of a conversation, a phrase which would serve as an introduction for another half an hour later. He did not delay so long this time. Madame de Tillières was only half deceived. He had come to talk to her about Casal. But he was not aware that the young man on the previous

evening had been one of the Countess' guests. Juliette had just said to him as she offered him one of the large anemones which are the glory of the South:

"Don't you compliment me on my flowers? Our mutual friend de Jardes has been kind and thoughtful enough to send them."

"Will he soon be back?" the diplomat asked. Then without waiting for the reply: "Do you think he will go as far as Monte Carlo and tempt fortune?"

"Very possibly," Juliette said.

"That reminds me," d'Avançon went on, making so much haste to grasp this handle in the conversation, that he destroyed all his pretensions to be a skilful diplomat, "that I was yesterday present in the Rue Royale and saw some of the highest play I have witnessed for a very long time. You reproached me with being hard upon Casal when I met him here the other day. How much money do you think he lost between half-past twelve and one o'clock in the morning? Come, mention an amount? Won't you? Ah well! three thousand pounds, what do you think of that? No doubt he had just come from one of those bars where his friends and himself have the pretty custom of going to stupefy themselves with alcohol, for all the time his inseparable companion, Lord Herbert Bohun, was asleep upon one of the club lounges and he himself seemed to be passably jolly. Yet these young fellews get annoyed when their elders give them a little moral lecture occasionally!"

"But," Madame de Tillières interrupted, "is M. Casal as wealthy as all that?"

" He had an income of 250,000 francs when he came of age," d'Avançon said. " But what has he left now ? That is quite another matter, what with women, luxury and the cards."

The ex-diplomat enjoyed his trumph as he told Juliette this anecdote with the object of proving that he had not on the other occasion slandered the young man. He continued to inveigh against gambling, without suspecting that the mind of his listener, who was so engaged in placing the tiny vases full of flowers here and there about the room, was touched in quite a different way by what he had just told her.

" So after leaving me at the Opera," she thought, "he went to drink and play." That was very simple. Did she not know that Casal, like so many more young men of his class and tastes, spent a part of the night at the club ? Why did the idea suddenly become so painful to her ? Did she think that a few words exchanged in a box at the theatre would as if by magic transform habits, which besides had no connexion with the conversation ? Had she secretly desired that he should receive from his talk with her an impression so strong that he would not wish to profane it that same evening ? Still, during the remainder of d'Avançon's visit, then during the afternoon and late into the night, she could not shake off this thought, obsessed, as she was, by the picture of the dissoluteness of a man's life, of which, however, she knew so little. This obsession, unfortunately for Juliette's peace of mind, continued the work begun in her by Madame de Candale. She felt the temptation to meet him redoubled, under the

specious enough though dangerous pretext of exerting her good influence over him. While thinking he was prejudicing Raymond in the eyes of Madame de Tillières, d'Avançon was furnishing these two persons, who were already too concerned with one another, with an excuse for meeting and conversation. The most reserved woman can lecture a man of the world for gambling, while she cannot do so on the subject of drunkenness without disgracing him, or upon gallantry without compromising herself. So when Casal appeared in the little Louis XVI drawing-room, twenty-four hours after the clumsy diplomat and two days after he had received at the Opera permission to call his visit had been desired with an eagerness which he would not have dared to suspect. Madame de Tillières was not on this occasion unwell or reclining in her long chair in one of those diaphanous garments which by their coquetry make up for the headache. But in her walking dress, though her hair was still uncovered by her hat, she had that girlish air, that face with its expression at once candid and shrewd, gentle and clever, which was her unique charm in her moments of relaxation and when she was not reserved. Entirely at the thought of what she meant to say to the young man, a red point burned in her cheeks and lit up her fine face, and her blue eyes had in them a look which Casal did not know, when she uttered this little phrase after the first commonplace remarks had been exchanged.

"You want people to believe that you have been slandered and yet you spend your nights gambling at your club. Don't deny it. I have

my spies. You lost more than 60,000 francs about one o'clock Saturday morning."

"But at two had won them back again and thirty thousand more," he replied with a laugh.

"That is worse still!" she went on. To conform to the programme, which was the only justification for a conversation of this intimate character, she began an anxious friend's gentle sermon, and Casal listened to it with a compunction which was only half feigned, the lively and scandalous Casal though he was, who had more than twenty times in his life lost more than 100,000 francs at one sitting, and the man who was the instructor of the young men about town, whose words they quoted, and followed his lead with their buttonholes!

Really those young frequenters of Phillips' who gave themselves stomach-ache through imbibing cocktails and brandy and soda by his side to attract his attention, would have been very much astonished to see him sitting in front of a young and very charming woman listening to a lecture on morals! The single dice with which they always gambled for their drinks upon the bar—"Herbert always sees two of them," Casal used to say—would have remained motionless with astonishment in its box! To this lecture the leader of fashion replied in phrases similar to those which had been so successful at the first dinner, upon the sorrows of his wasted life, his weariness of heart, and his need of diversion, just like the words of the repentant villain in moral plays! It must be added that during this edifying conversation, he ran through in his own mind the events of Friday

night and Saturday morning to discover who had done him such a good turn with Madame de Tillières. He remembered leaving the Opera, so happy because of Juliette's answer that he had an access of affection for Candale and had accompanied that lout on foot to the Rue de Tilsitt. Afterwards he had gone to the club. What friend of Madame de Tillières had he seen? D'Avançon, of course, standing among the spectators watching the play. The old beau hastened to denounce him to the recluse of the Rue Matignon. That was an action of the sort men find hardest to forgive and rightly so. A law of masculine freemasonry enacts that women are never to be initiated into the scenes which take place inside clubs. Husbands and lovers have too much interest in this discretion not to observe it themselves and see that others do the same. But Raymond would have willingly given the ex-diplomat half his winnings to recompense him for this great service. Was not this a fresh proof of the sympathy the Marquise already had for him? Then what a platform for manœuvring this feminine sermonizing provided. It sufficed for him to receive it docilely, to have the right to say at the end of his visit:

"If I could be sure of even an hour's talk a day like this, I would give my word of honour not to play for a year at least."

"Give it all the same," Madame de Tillières said with coquettish grace.

"Do you wish me to?" he went on in such a serious tone that the young woman suddenly realized how far, without noticing, she had advanced along the pathway of familiarity. It was too late

to draw back, and in a jesting tone she continued:

"Oh! a year, that would be asking too much. Suppose you begin with three months?"

"Very well! you have my word of honour," he replied still very seriously. "April, May, June. From now till July I will not touch a card."

"We shall see about that!" she went on, laughing still more; and in order that this promise, which had been formulated with some solemnity, should not constitute a first secret between the two of them, she added: "That will give a great deal of pleasure to some one with whom I am lunching to-morrow. Can you guess who it is? Madame de Candale. I shall take her your promise quite red-hot."

She had no sooner pronounced those words than she realized their danger, and particularly after the young man's departure, it appeared to her that she had committed a grave imprudence. Would he not take this phrase as an appointment and what would he think of her then? She thought of writing to Gabrielle as a precaution and postponing the lunch till another day. She could hardly do so. The following day was the anniversary of the day when she and Madame de Candale had first met as young girls. They had adopted the affectionate custom of lunching together on this date, first at the home of one and then the other, and it was also an excuse for that exchange of delightful presents which is one of the charms of a woman's friendship. They adore these opportunities for visiting the shops and seeing the novelties. They experience a childish delight in

handling the thousand luxurious and fashionable nicknacks, which are as fine as their own fingers.

They feel a unique pleasure in giving each other pleasant surprises, which are no more surprises than are Christmas and birthday presents at the age of ten. In this way Juliette had prepared for Gabrielle the most delightful china-handled parasol, and nothing in the world would have made her give up the pleasure of presenting this to her friend on the actual day. "Suppose I were to invite her to lunch with me?" She thought, "then if Casal had tried to obtain an invitation he would think I was afraid of him. But he shall not have the chance." Her thoughts had agitated her so that she had forgotten Poyanne when the usual time arrived for her to write him an account of her day. This time she did not reason with herself for a moment as to whether she should mention to him Casal's name or not. She already accepted the compromise, or rather the duality of conscience, which this secret from her lover represented. She did not escape, in spite of the sophisms with which she had lulled her conscience, an obscure feeling of remorse which disturbed her so much as to render the composition of the letter as difficult as that of the previous one:

"Good gracious," she said to herself as she finished it, "how do women who deceive their husbands manage? I have only to be discreetly silent on one point, and yet it is so painful to me! It would not do for this to happen often."

She tried to persuade herself into the belief that she did not desire to see Casal again so soon. Really when she reached the Rue de Tilsitt at lunch time

with the precious parasol, if she had not found Raymond there she would have been rather disappointed. But she had correctly anticipated the effect of her imprudent phrase. The young man's first act on leaving the Rue Matignon had been to tell his coachman to drive to the Candale mansion. He had found the Countess engaged in examining jewels placed in open cases, the latest of those little masterpieces of the goldsmith's art over which the jewellers of Old Bond Street and the Rue de la Paix have daily quarrels.

"I am glad you have come," she said gaily when she saw Casal, "which of these bracelets do you prefer?" She showed him two golden circles one covered with black enamel on which the word "Remember" was written in rose letters, the other enclosed a microscopic watch, that original paradox of elegance which has to-day descended to vulgarity.

"This one," the young man said picking out the second. "It has a double advantage; first of all it does not show off a pretentious device, and then it is so handy for saying good-bye. Yes," he went on with his gay laugh, "suppose a woman is bored by her lover. She dare not look at the clock to see if she can with decency leave him. She can put her arms round the neck of her beloved, she can lean her pretty head sideways to see the time at her wrist."

"That idea is just like you," the Countess said. "It would serve you right were your impertinence repeated to the person for whom I have selected this bracelet, and as your punishment it shall be, and no later than to-morrow morning."

"Is it Madame de Tillières?" Casal said.

"You see he has guessed at once," the Countess interrupted. "Suppose it is Madame de Tillières?"

"Be just," Raymond went on, "repeat to her my impertinences, as you call them, in my presence, so that I can defend myself."

"Are you free to-morrow morning?" asked the Countess. "Come to lunch: but try to deserve the honour, for it is an honour to be invited on that day."

She explained to him with full details the story of their friendship, to which Casal had religiously to listen, and on her entry into the little drawing-room of the Rue de Tilsitt, the first person to see Juliette was the young man. Yes, she would have been slightly disappointed if he had not tried in this way to see her, but she was not hypocrite enough to at once assume the disturbed and reserved expression which she wore when Casal paid her his first visit. Ambiguous situations like this make a pretext for these contrasts. She must be in turn and in all good faith affected in her interest for Raymond or touched in what she considered was her duty to Poyanne, as long as she gave place in herself to the sentimental complications which led her at this early period to be moved at the same time by these two men.

But if Casal was simple enough to take seriously the mute reproach for his indiscretion, which this sudden coldness conveyed to him, Gabrielle only saw in it a short comedy destined to deceive a feeling of remorse. She was bubbling over with infectious gaiety as she took the arm of her previous day's visitor to go to the dining-room

while Candale escorted Juliette. The ladies of Paris have a particular taste for arranging these little, clandestine but innocent, lunches, which are pleasing to them in every way, in th[illegible]y for more unrestricted intimacy, in th[illegible]y that no chance visitor will disturb them, [illegible]ast of all, dare we mention it, in the somewhat [illegible]nal joy of eating with a good appetite. It is like supper, when they have any, the only meal at which their pretty white teeth do themselves real justice. In the morning they get up very late and hardly nibble the bread and butter with their tea. They go to their dinner at eight o'clock laced in their corsets like a horse guard in his red tunic: so tired out by the day, their stomachs troubled by the tea, pastry and cakes at five o'clock, and concerned by twenty interests either of the heart or society, of a meal, the menu of which alone awakens an echo in the toe of a gouty subject, they eat hardly enough to sustain their nerves till midnight. About midday, on the contrary, they have had a walk, and breathed the air of the Bois. They wear a little English costume of soft cloth, which is not too tight. Lunch with one or two friends—not more—is a little improvised affair, the more so since the gentleman with whom they lunch must of necessity be a man of leisure and have nothing to do but to please them.

In Paris no business man lunches, so this is the opportunity for those who are too dainty to put up with the wing of a cold partridge, and these are the men who receive the flattering and absorbing title of friend. One is often astonished that a woman's choice, not only in passion but also in

simple affection, rests upon a person with no more intelligence than an insignificant gossip and without any other apparent virtue than good manners a[illegible] tailor. Nine times out of ten, however, it[illegible] that these inexplicable favourites also ha[illegible] quality, the most important of all, that of always being present. At the root of the dislike Madame de Candale had for Poyanne, there was this special grief; she wished him, occupying as he did a large place in Juliette's sympathy, to keep himself, as he did, aloof from these little affairs. The double desire not to compromise Madame de Tallières and to be equal to his work had in fact caused the Count to withdraw almost entirely from society, and Gabrielle, as she watched her friend and Casal sitting opposite one another at the lunch table, could not help carrying on this little monologue to herself with that power of self-division which modern writers imagine they have discovered—just as if every woman has not naturally excelled for centuries in this art of living and at the same time watching themselves live :

"My little Juliette persists in her severe countenance. She would like to make us believe that she is angry. There is no need, madame, to have when talking to me that look of abstraction in your eyes, and it only proves to me that you are listening to Casal's conversation with Louis. If she could become really fond of him and they were to be married ? If she marries the savage, Henry de Poyanne, I shall lose her, but if it were to be Raymond, who has tastes similar to Louis, our tastes, what a pleasant life we should lead ! He appears to me to be quite smitten. Good, she

is unbending. He has just finished speaking and is beginning to look at her! Come. He is speaking to her. She answers him. She is becoming friendly."

This little silent commentary was the accompaniment of one of those conversations which flitted, after the usual fashion, through the countless little preoccupations of Paris, from the races at Auteuil to politics, or from the latest lawsuit to kitchen details, by way of the theatre and allusions to the latest scandal, till chance led Candale to say to Raymond—

"I admired you yesterday. It is the first time I ever saw you refuse to take the bank, and with Machault, too, who always wins."

"I watched," the other replied with a shrug of his shoulders, "I have fallen out with the Queen of Spades."

"That at least is a reasonable caprice," Gabrielle said, "but from what day does it date and how long will it last?"

"It is not a caprice, madame, I swear," the young man replied with the same sincere simplicity he had used when he gave his word of honour. This phrase, understood only by Juliette, made her tremble to her inmost fibres. Had Casal told her in so many words that he loved her, she would not have felt more emotion. She turned away her eyes for a moment so that he should not read in them the confused sentiments which disturbed her, among which a kind of invincible pleasure seemed to dominate. She ought, taking these words as they had been spoken, to have wrapped herself in a more and more impenetrable reserve.

From that moment, on the contrary, it was impossible for her to keep her defensive mask. In proving to her the immediate benefit of the first advice received, did not Raymond excuse her in her own eyes for the easy access she had granted him? But above all he continued to please her greatly, thanks to that personal magnetism which disconcerts all analysis and which seems to justify savants in considering love to be a single physical phenomenon. Long after Louis de Candale had left the smoking-room, whither they had adjourned after luncheon, the young woman was still there subjugated by the charm of Raymond's presence. Her abandonment to this charm was so complete that she received a shock when on looking at the watch in the bracelet which the Countess had clasped upon her wrist, she saw how the time had gone.

"Three o'clock!" she cried in real surprise. "I ordered my carriage for two! Well I must be off."

"Will you wait for me?" asked Gabrielle. "I will go out with you."

"Ah!" Juliette said, as she was putting on her hat in front of the mirror, "I wish I could, but I must go and fetch mother."

She was herself astonished as she went down the staircase at this fresh untruth she had so quickly invented. Why? Only because she would have been unable to bear without suffering Gabrielle's teasing. The secret reproaches of her conscience muttered very loudly in her heart. As usual on leaving the Rue Matignon the footman had put into the carriage the letters which had arrived by the

midday delivery. There were three letters, one of them from Poyanne. Madame de Tillières looked at the address for a long while before she opened it. She had a feeling, to an almost unbearable extent, that she was behaving very badly towards her absent friend. Under the influence of this remorse she saw him in his exile at Besançon, sitting at his table and writing to her after his feverish political struggles, to refresh his soul with her dear memory. All the motives of tender admiration which attached her to the great orator were at once awakened in her. Her hands trembled as she tore open the envelope. Perhaps if on this occasion she had found in his pages a loving effusive phrase she would have found in this moment of internal crisis the strength to recover possession of her heart. The most decisive moments of our sentimental existence are such as these, when emotion overwhelms too quickly for us to be deceived as to its nature, without however drowning all our scruples. But it was again a bold cheerful almost careless letter, which the Count believed would please his mistress. Not a word vibrated in it which could touch Juliette's suffering soul in the right place. Oh! the misunderstandings of separation! The cruel irreparable disagreements which are carried and redoubled by pages upon which we know not how to put, we dare not pour out our heart's blood and all its tears! Writing to a woman one loves after several days separation is like talking to her without seeing her eyes; it is like uttering words the echo of which escapes us in the creature we idolize, alas! and sometimes we lose it for ever. She reads our letter repeating

as Juliette did a hundred times over, "How he has changed!" It was not true: but believing was to her very dangerous at the time she was about to be surrounded by the wiles of the cleverest and best planned of seductions.

It must be mentioned, in order not to be unjust to this charming and usually so prudent woman, that Raymond was clever enough during the few weeks which separated his first meeting from Poyanne's return, to behave himself with irreproachable tact. Had he been informed with minute exactness as to Madame de Tillières temporary isolation, he could not have displayed more delicate finesse. But this tact and finesse was not, as far as he was concerned, the result of calculation. No, he simply abandoned himself to the sincerity of his own emotions. There was Juliette's real danger; the young man was acting towards her, naturally and under the impulse of his real sensibility, as the cleverest diplomat would have done. Through such a depressing life, he had remained keen enough by nature, artist enough in his sensations to let hmself go with delight at the attraction of relations quite new to him and without a single one of those violences of vanity, which hasten the attacks and awaken distrust in women. Now when a professional man of the world, who has much abused the art of gallantry, becomes really amorous of an honourable woman, or one he believes to be such, he has a sudden return of youth, like an intoxication of rejuvenation which turns him into a fresh person and one of singular interest for the woman to whom he offers the sweetest flattery. Perhaps there is no pheno-

menon which better shows how love grafts in us, according to the admirable formula of an old philosopher, a new animal upon the animal of habits, so that to love is to become an entirely different person, and at least for a time to conduct oneself in quite a different way to what one's past, character, ideas and whole person would lead to expect.

This rejuvenation begins in the head and rests, like all lasting or momentary conversions, upon a general law of the intelligence. We all have the imagination of our habits. To occupy oneself with a woman in a libertine is to see in detail as precise as the engravings of a book of debauchery the way in which she will give herself, and the kind of pleasure he will experience with her. It was this glance of a connoisseur in impurity with which Casal on the first evening had enveloped Madame de Tillières, stripping her from her evening dress, and judging her as a courtesan. After their second meeting, he realized the impossibility of brutalizing her thus in his thoughts, an impossibility which increased in proportion as the number of their meetings multiplied. For he soon found a way to see her often, sometimes at Madame de Candale's, sometimes at the theatre, and sometimes at the Rue Matignon. It was particularly there in their talks in the little quiet-tinted drawing-room, that he felt most strongly the mixture of passionate desire and absolute respect which Juliette almost at once imposed upon him. She had on the third visit and those which followed, in the reserved and gracious kindness with which she received him, in the gesture with which she picked up some work as she showed him a seat, in the sound of her voice

in its first few phrases, a way of abolishing the familiarity acquired at their preceding talks, and half of this conversation therefore was spent in regaining the lost ground. Then when she stretched herself in a pose of careless abandon, her eyes were impenetrable and inaccessible; it was a chastity of attitude which did not permit the slightest boldness of conversation, while in particular she gave the impression that she was a creature the slightest thing would wound, and that is a safer defence than any other when a man is really in love. It is the flower with the very fragile petals before which hesitate the fingers which would like to pluck it, and Casal, overcome by this influence, quickly acquired the habit of retiring after his visits without having done anything more than enjoy the inner tremor with which her presence penetrated him, to reason with himself upon the pavement of the lonely Rue Matignon like this:

"I used to laugh so heartily when a friend of mine was captured by a woman! But I must confess this one is like no other." Then as if he still retained his cleverness in spite of his emotion: "But they all said that," he added. Then after a gleam of doubt: "No, this time I am not mistaken, I am sure that she is unique."

He then dropped into the usual lover's occupation, which has lasted since the beginning of the world and consists of demonstrating the reasons for prefering this friend to all others. That seems to be a very insipid occupation for a man wearied, as he was, of all kinds of pleasure. But the fact which added a singular piquancy to this romance was that Raymond's moral regeneration was

accomplished in a fashion as unfavourable as possible to sentiments of that nature. As he continued to frequent the society of his friends and to follow his pursuits as a clubman and sportsman, he almost at once experienced to an extreme degree that feeling of a double life, which corresponds so well among the civilized to the multiplicity of the person and gives to every secret liaison, however innocent it may be, the poetry of mystery. Besides, the details of one of his days taken, haphazard, which may be given as typical of the young man's life during these few weeks, will show better than any analysis, the complexity of this passion, which only needed the time to produce and develop habits quite contrary to all passion.

A month has already passed since Casal at the Opera so timidly asked permission to call. It is ten o'clock in the morning. The lover is dressing in his dressing-room in the Rue de Lisbonne. Upon a little table placed in front of his famous case of boots is standing an open jewel-case displaying a row of pearls destined for use as his parting gift for Christine Anroux. That poor actress had become quite unbearable to him, so much so that he decided to cease her acquaintance altogether, though their liaison was not at all a serious one; he was a man who used to say: " I have never broken with a woman. I keep them all." Upon a lounge was resting Herbert Bohun, who had come to ride with him. Remaining athletic in spite of his excesses, with a wasted face and the shoulders of a boxer, the Englishman tapped the carpet with the end of his whip, and very occasionally said something, but he had a habit

of taking very little before midday. He was telling in telegraphic style about his previous evening.

"Excellent dinner last night at Machaselts'. I would not have taken twenty pounds for my thirst when we sat down to table. White Château Margaux, very satisfactory. Afterwards Latour 69, excellent. Good champagne and superior red port. Afterwards to Phillips'. Expected to see you there. Just my luck. Not able to finish the night even with the whisky there."

While this terrible alcohol maniac, who was famous for saying in India when he fell down in a street during an earthquake: "I did not think I was as full as all that," was deploring his unsatisfactory night, Raymond, sitting at his toilette, was smiling at his thoughts. He could see himself, at the very time Herbert was waiting for him at Phillips', in the drawing-room of the Rue de Tilsitt talking to Gabrielle and Juliette. About what? He only remembered Madame de Tillières' toilette, her black lace dress over the rose silk, the same one she wore on the first evening he saw her. But as Herbert insisted—

"Six days you have disappointed me! Some fresh woman, I suppose?"

"No, certainly not," Casal said. "I was tired and went to bed at eleven."

"You thrive on it," the other one went on. "Good colour, clear eye, and good form. Are you ready?"

The fact is that for years Casal had not been as good-looking a fellow as he was then, and never had the sensation of physical life been as strong in him. The aristocratic and *galant* ladies who

walked in the avenues of the Bois on this spring morning said as they saw him pass on horseback with Lord Herbert—

"Casal is astonishing, he never looks more than twenty-five!"

In the rejuvenation of libertines by a romantic love a second and more powerful principle, although it is quite contrary in appearance to the romantic, lies in the sudden interruption of their constant excesses. A kind of animal convalescence is then produced in their physiology. The exhausting fatigue of the daily dissipation is replaced by an economy of strength which renews all the man's energies, and—such is the irony of nature—the renewing is very often noticed by the man in whom it takes place in the form of a sentimental joy! Never had Casal felt more pleasure in riding, not the quiet Boscard, but Téméraire, by Roméo out of Fichue-Rosse, the fastest of his horses, and when the two friends returned to the Rue de Lisbonne to breakfast, Casal ate his with a good appetite while the drunkard hardly tasted the exquisite dishes prepared by the culinary artist Raymond had inherited from his father. There was, however, another and nobler cause for the young man's gaiety than the brutal energy of strength and health. In a chat on the previous evening he had surprised an allusion made by Madame de Tillières to a projected expedition to a shop in the Rue de la Paix, and he had promised himself to be on the look-out for the carriage he knew so well. The joy of doing youthful actions is the most unquestionable sign of passion in a man over thirty-five, especially

when that man is trained to the reflective positivism which debauchery, like business and politics, supposes. So we find Raymond walking along between the Place Vendome and the Avenue de l'Opéra like a provincial aping the fashions, and gazing into all the shops one after the other. His heart beat faster, he had seen Juliette through a shop window. He went in, and assumed the surprised look of a boy caught cheating to greet her. But as she did not appear annoyed, he escorted her to her carriage with a childish happiness, which did not desert him for the rest of the afternoon. Presently, when he is fencing, doing gymnastic exercises, his skill will be admired, but he will think of nothing but a blond head bowing farewell at a carriage window, and in the evening he will think of it again at Madame d'Arcole's, where he will linger in the hope of seeing the same blond head and those eyes, so sweet that they maddened him, so reserved and penetrating that they always stopped him on the brink of a confession! But Juliette did not come and, instead of going for consolation to Phillips' and the club, Raymond returned alone to the Rue de Lisbonne reasoning like this—

"All the same I am a little too simple. It is one of two things, she is either a coquette or she is fond of me. In either case it is necessary to act. I tell myself that every evening, and then the next day I allow myself to be conquered by her pretty look. I don't know myself now. But why? I have never met any one like her. In her presence I become small and insignificant. But what of her? If I displeased her, would she receive

me as she has done, three or four times a week? She knew I was going to the Duchess' this evening; she was invited before I was. Why has she not come? She had something sorrowful in her eyes to-day, something like suffering. I have learned the story of her life. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, not a shadow of any sort in it. What can make her ceaselessly repress herself like this, as if she were struggling against a thought? But it is very simple. She loves me, without wishing to do so. Well, to-morrow shall be the day.

Yes, what a thought? The young man slept upon the question to which his profound knowledge of women allowed him to make this reply so delightfully soothing to his anxiety. He was quite correct in thus interpreting the uncertainty he perceived in Madame de Tillières' usual demeanour, but he was mistaken in thinking, as he did, that religious principles, the desire to safeguard her position, fear for her character, and the faithful memory of a husband tragically torn away from her, produced this oscillation in Juliette's heart, this surrender and recoil by turns. The thought, continuing to grow in this heart which a gentle slope has already diverted from the path traced by the will, is that Poyanne's return is drawing near and nearer every minute. A fortnight, ten days, five more and he will return, and she will have to explain to him how it is she has admitted a new-comer to her intimate acquaintance and such a new-comer too! without once mentioning his name in her letters, after countless postponements of so doing.

Ah! how hard to spend are those last few hours when the expectancy of what she fears is mingled in so cruel a fashion with remorse for what she has permitted—she cannot herself say why. It would have been so small a thing for any one else, so small a thing for her even, if she had spoken! To-morrow Henry will enter the drawing-room where Casal is to-day. What shall she say to him? Why did she foresee this difficulty from the first, and yet, why foreseeing it, has she allowed things to reach this crisis? If she told her absent lover the truth, what phrases could she find to describe to him the shades of sentiment through which she has passed and which have led her to commit a series of actions which she knew would displease Poyanne—and do them, too, in silence? But did she herself know what these shades of sentiment were? Dare she look at her own soul with her usual sincerity? No. She was too much afraid of finding something which she knew was concealed there. If she continued to keep silent, could she hope that her lover would not discover that she received Casal, if not quite in the same way that she did d'Avançon, Miraut and a few others, at least pretty regularly? "Her lover." She repeated those words as if she had re-acquired a knowledge, lost for a few weeks, of a situation which was the dangerous secret and definite engagement of her life. Then she tried to recover herself, to at least understand through what influence she had allowed days to follow days, one dragging another into a vortex which had brought her to the position she was in now.

It was quite in vain for her to tell herself that,

during these few weeks, flown with almost supernatural rapidity, Raymond had not said a word to which Poyanne might not have listened—to establish by facts that her relations with the young man were nothing more than official visits, and official meetings at the theatre or at Madame de Candale's—to affirm that she had not for a minute overstepped her rights as an independent woman—to fix her mind upon the idea that she only desired to perform a good action in receiving a man with so bad a reputation—these paradoxes of conscience, which seemed to her so specious, vanished before the necessity of an explanation, very simple though it might be. Why then was the period of waiting so painful to the poor woman, that she spent in bed, a victim to the most terrible moral distress, the whole afternoon preceding the return of the man to whom she had given herself for ever. Hardly a gleam of daylight succeeded in penetrating the drawn curtains of her room. She was there with her eyes open, her temples throbbing with headache, watching. What was she watching? What tempest had been let loose in her troubled conscience? A knock at the door, gentle but distinct because of the great silence, made her tremble and she saw Gabrielle come to visit her after hearing from Madame de Nançay the news of Henry de Poyanne's return and her friend's headache. The little Countess sat down close to the bed. She took hold of Juliette's burning hands and said to her with that instinctive curiosity which in the best of friends is mingled with their pity—

"Then Poyanne is returning to-morrow?"

"Yes," Madame de Tillières replied in a weak voice.

"But," Madame de Candale went on as she drew a little nearer, "won't he be a little bit jealous of your friend?"

"Oh! be quiet," Juliette said pressing more tightly the hand in her own, "I don't want to think of it."

"Come," the Countess insisted, "that is what is making you so ill, you are exciting yourself over childish scruples. You are quite at liberty to receive any one you please. Let me talk to you just once as a sister? Raymond pleases you very much, and let me tell you something else you know very well?"

"No, be quiet," Madame de Tillières repeated, rising up and looking distractedly at her friend, "I will not listen to you."

"But," continued Gabrielle, who in the face of this trouble which was quite inexplicable to her, decided to strike a blow, "why should you not marry him?"

"Marry him?" cried Juliette in heartrending tones; "that is impossible, you understand, quite impossible."

"Why?"

"Because I am not free," said the wretched woman as she fell back upon her pillows; and then amid her sobs her heart full of unconfessed troubles opened in a confession to which Madame Candale, also in tears, listened. The Countess did not say to herself, as ninety women out of a hundred would have done: "I have been very foolish." She did not wish to deceive Juliette

as to her ignorance of the part Poyanne had played in her existence. The little Countess was too kind-hearted to lower herself to such trickery. She merely realized with fear what a terrible game she had played in throwing, as she had done, Casal into Madame de Tillières' life. She was overwhelmed by her own handiwork, for she had not a moment's hesitation now. She saw distinctly what Juliette dared not read in her own heart, a beginning of passionate love for Raymond and that in the same burst of revelation which had just informed her of the liaison with Henry.

"Ah! poor little one, poor little one!" she groaned as she covered her friend with kisses; then in tones of anguish she went on—

"But what are you going to do?"

"Ah!" said Madame de Tillières in despair, "how do I know now?"

CHAPTER VII

THE LIVING REMAINS OF A DEAD LOVE

CERTAIN parts of our character are so special, so intimately and naturally our own, that passion, the magician who transforms so many things in the human being, leaves these parts intact. Madame de Tillières, embarked almost against her will upon the perilous pathway of a new love, during the weeks of her increasing intimacy with Raymond, had none the less continued to be, where this growing sentiment was not concerned, the same prudent and discreet woman as in the past, the woman whom the evil-minded accused of being sly, while her admirers adored her delicate reserve. She had found a way, during the six weeks from day to day, to prevent her mother and her intimate friends from meeting Casal too often. One of these friends was less easy to deceive than the others, for d'Avançon from the time of the young man's first visit had experienced in the presence of this unexpected guest an unconscious movement of distrust. His attack on that occasion, then his denunciation of the gambling at the club had been received in a way contrasting too strongly with Juliette's habitual docility not to astonish him. He then opened his eyes and soon acquired the mortifying conviction that a friendship had been formed between

Casal and Juliette, thanks to the agency of Madame de Candale. It had sufficed for him to unexpectedly call in the Rue Matignon and find Raymond there, to go to the Opéra or the Théâtre Français and see Raymond there talking to Madame de Tillières, for his distrust to become exalted into a jealousy as passionate as it was, strictly speaking, without justification. The young woman redoubled this jealousy by showing that she was irritated at it, and she told him so one day when he began his diatribes against the young men of the day, in a way which took away his desire to resume the discussion of the subject.

The old beau had with regard to Madame de Tillières a sentiment consisting of too great a mixture of vanity and interest to be sacrificed because of an injury to his self-conceit. He had first of all a real affection for her, for his was a tender and faithful heart, then he made use of his clever friend to preserve a little peace in his household, having in Madame d'Avançon, whom a nervous malady had confined to her room for years, the most peevish of partners, and last of all he was proud to represent the life of fashion to this elegant creature, in the same way that Poyanne represented politics, Miraut the arts, Accragne philanthropy, and General de Jardes the memory of Tillières. If he was a devoted whist player at his club, if he did not lose a word of the gossip in drawing-rooms or behind the scenes at the Opéra, his object was to visit his friend with a confidential and important air, and he brought to the beautiful recluse an echo of the Paris of pleasure. He would have certainly knitted his

brows at the intrusion of any new-comer into the sanctuary of the little Louis XVI drawing-room. But nothing could be more disagreeable to him than to see there one of the fashionable heroes; without taking into account the instinctive antipathy he had felt for years for Casal, that of a leader of one generation for one of the next. Must we add that a detail in the present case exasperated the antagonism? On Casal's first visit d'Avançon had posed a little too much as master and lord of the paradise of the Rue Matignon. Perhaps he would not have been annoyed at making a pretence of more extensive rights than those he enjoyed. This sort of boasting enters very considerably into the rivalry between women's friends, who have not passion as their excuse. Attitudes assumed, dominate so strangely the obscure world and change our vain sensibility. The most obvious result of these diverse influences was that on the evening before Poyanne's return the diplomat had already made three attacks upon Casal, not in Madame de Tillières' presence, but among her intimate friends. He had begun with her mother, upon whom he regularly called, and he had drawn of Madame de Corcieux's old friend such a black picture that he had missed his aim through excess of zeal, forgetting his idol M. de Talleyrand's great principle: everything which is exaggerated is insignificant.

"Be quite easy in your mind," Madame de Nançay had answered him. "If he is as you describe him, he will not often come to see Juliette."

She had spoken to her daughter with indulgent irony of the uneasiness of their mutual

friend. Madame de Tillières had begun to laugh, and a joke about this strange jealousy, combined with Casal's perfect behaviour on the one or two occasions the old lady had met him, had sufficed to make her unalterable confidence in her daughter continue, the more so when the latter added, not without a feeling of remorse, in speaking of Raymond—

"He is one of Madame de Candale's intimate friends."

D'Avançon, defeated in this quarter and convinced of the fact by a fresh talk to Madame de Nançay, had fallen back upon those of the five habitués of the Rue Matignon who were in Paris, Miraut and Accragne. He knew how great was Juliette's attachment for both of them. If they were to tell her that gossip was already engaged upon the assiduous attentions of a man of the world as scandalized as Casal, without a doubt she would force the young man to make his visits less frequent. There was a certain amount of indelicacy in thus involving friends, to whom Casal's visits to Juliette might have remained unknown, for the satisfaction of his personal antipathy. But the unfortunate diplomat did not realize that under these circumstances he was only obeying fickle egoists. Being received more coldly in the Rue Matignon since his attempt to influence the mother, he began to suffer cruelly on account of this new state of affairs, and if he did not go as far as to suspect that Madame de Tillières was enamoured of Raymond, he was not very far wrong in seeing a vague danger in an intimacy which at first had simply wounded him. He be-

lieved in good faith then that he was acting in the interests of his best friend, when he visited, as he did one afternoon, Miraut's studio to open the latter's eyes.

The artist lived in the Rue Vète next to a house then occupied by his companion in Italy, the regretted Nittis, whose home was at that time a rendezvous for amateurs and clever authors. It was under the influence of this Neapolitan, so enamoured of modernity, that Miraut modified his work and inaugurated his pastel portraits. At this time he was especially famous for his flower pictures, and like many other painters of almost feminine touch with the brush, this master of delicacy was a man of athletic mould, with broad shoulders and a François I profile. This phenomenon of contrast between the apparent physiology of the man and his work is noticeable in an inverse sense, and cannot be explained any more than in the case of Delacroix for instance, the puny painter of works of violent action, or Puget in the past and probably Michael Angelo himself. This painter Hercules had something of a young girl's gentleness in his character, a childish timidity, a naïve need of protection and petting as disconcerting as the playfulness of enormous dogs with the strength of lions and the docility of poodles. Thanks to the frequency of these anomalies the figure of the good giant in so many stories has been created, the Porthos of the jolly genial Dumas remaining its most popular incarnation. When d'Avançon entered the studio, the painter was standing at his easel copying a cluster of white saffron and red carnations, wearing, accord-

ing to his custom, a sumptuous suit of black velvet, and half closing his brown eyes to see more closely. There was magic in the tenuity of the delicate brush strokes of this hand, strong enough to break a five franc piece. He gave the diplomat a fine reception, talking, as he painted, with the facility of doing two things at once, which unveils a mechanical and almost laborious side in the painter's talent. That is, too, the reason why they remain so cheerful through life, while the writer, more and more deprived of movement, obliged to the continuous absorption of thought in his work, continues to grow more sorrowful. D'Avançon was too much a man of the world in the bad sense of the term, not to despise a little that sort of nature and he did not often visit the Rue Vète. He considered that the very rarity of his visits would give more importance to his revelations as to the new friendship between Casal and Juliette. He was reckoning without the extreme subtlety hidden in many artists when their vanity does not enter into the affair. While painting with his usual conscientiousness the petals of his pretty flowers, Miraut had asked himself what could be the object of the diplomat's visit. He understood it on the sound of the voice with which his friend suddenly asked—

"Are you the man to render Madame de Tillières a real service?"

Then d'Avançon began practically the same story to which Madame de Nançay had already listened. As he spoke he could see the painter's eyes darken with uneasiness. The idea alone of making any observations to Juliette on the

subject made the poor man's hand tremble so that he put down his brush to utter this phrase, so simple and yet so logical—

"Why don't you tell her so yourself ?"

"Because I am not a friend of Casal's," d'Avançon replied, "and coming from me the advice consequently would carry no weight."

"But," the painter retorted, "I am a friend of his, and I can assure you that you are mistaken with regard to him." Delighted at thinking of this escape, he picked up his brushes and went on painting, singing, as he did so, the praises of Raymond, to which the diplomat had to listen : "He is a very clever man, did you know it ? He will divert her a little ; where do you see any harm in it ? I can judge fashionable people to the smallest detail, because I am only a painter. When I listen to one of the drawing-room connoisseurs talking pictures I know what to expect. I say to myself : 'You, my boy, you draw and paint, and know nothing about it ; you are only a boaster. You have no pretensions to teach me my business, you are clever.' But you, d'Avançon, you have watched me painting for half an hour without giving me advice. That is tact, my dear friend. Ah well ! this fellow Casal is full of it, and has taste as well."

"Only an artist's pride," growled the old beau a quarter of an hour later as he went down the Avenue de Villiers. He is indeed a fine fellow, as he said himself, and loves Juliette with all his heart. Casal must have paid him a few compliments about one of his pictures, and captured his affections. But now for Accragne.

He is an austere man, not won over by compliments."

With a foot still light in spite of his age, and well shod, he crossed the threshold of the house, on the fifth floor of which the ex-magistrate lived. Left a widower without children after ten years of happy married life, at the moment the régime, to which he had consecrated his life, ceased, Ludovic Accragne had imprisoned himself in philanthropy, just as a savant wraps up in his studies. He had forgotten himself, and had found peace in the absolute oblivion of self for the benefit of works of charity. He had remained an administrator of charity, on his retirement, and boldly undertook a task which the most devoted usually decline—the correspondence and accounts. His friendship for Madame de Tillières, whom he had known in her youth, and met again in Paris, was the only flower in his existence which had become happy through abdication. It must be added, to more completely describe an original figure, that this just man had inherited from his father, an old professor of the university, a fund of invincible Voltairism, against which Juliette and Madame de Nançay vainly waged war. While thinking of the different traits in his nature, in the lift which bore him to the top of the lofty house, d'Avançon thought out a way of approaching him without receiving one of those thrusts with which Ludovic Accragne was only too pleased to favour him because of his antiquated elegance.

"Bah ! " he said to himself, " I will employ the method which succeeded with Rogister in '66 at Florence."

It must be admitted even at the risk of diminishing the merit of this unique negotiation of which the ex-diplomat was so proud, that the method had consisted simply of flattering the mania of Count Otto von Rogister, who was an erudite numismatist, but a very mediocre minister. D'Avançon had become friendly with him by inspecting his collection, and handing over with a good grace a beautiful gold coin of which he was possessed. This friendship between the Prussian and French envoys had ended in one of those moderate and useless successes, which comprise the glory of ministries, the knowledge beforehand of important news, a knowledge which could under no circumstances have made any difference to the course of events. Rogister's official career had been ruined by his indiscretion, but he had departed from Florence so pleased with his coin that he had neglected to bear malice against his treacherous adversary; and since that time the latter considered himself the equal of Rothan or Saint Vallier, the two most famous of that generation of his colleagues at the Quai d'Orsay. We have seen to what blunders his naïve infatuation led this man. His real intelligence and good heart were spoiled by the memory of that success, long past but ever present in his conceit. Who can estimate the ravages an isolated success can produce upon a destiny? If d'Avançon had not believed himself to be a great genius in skilful intrigue he would not have conceived the strange plan of leaguing Juliette's various friends against Casal, and he would not have been enraged, as he was, and wounded in his self-conceit by the quad-

ruple check he received from Juliette herself, Madame de Nançay, Miraut and d'Accragne.

He attacked the great philanthropist upon his most vulnerable point by questioning him in detail as to the night refuge, the most noble charitable achievement of that period. The retired magistrate beamed upon him. He displayed to his visitor plans for hospitals, and turned over estimates, the green cases of which gave the room a very mournful appearance. M. Ludovic Accragne would have been a person with a long bony body, with enormous hands and feet, and a bald head of almost repulsive ugliness if the worn face, the red-rimmed eyes of which were shielded by blue spectacles, had not been lit up by a smile of angelic goodness. This goodness was also betrayed in his voice, one of those gentle eager voices which become to the memory the only physiognomy of their owners. His voice almost trembled as he replied after d'Avançon had pronounced his phrase—

"Now, dear friend, let me implore you to render Madame de Tillières a real service."

"What?" Accragne said as the kind smile returned to his lips directly the name of Casal was mentioned. "I know what it is," he went on. "Our dear Madame de Tillières has interested him in our work. He has already subscribed ten new beds. What can I do? One must flirt a little for love of the poor. You, a churchman, cannot be indignant about it. The Church invented purgatory to support the creed."

"That is the finishing stroke," d'Avançon said to himself as he stepped into the lift after this

time having to endure, not an eulogy of Casal, but a few more or less happily inspired pleasantries from the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, "and he does not see that if this fellow gives his money to his work instead of putting it on the green cloth, must it not quite naturally be with an evil object? It is very unfortunate de Jardes is away, for I should undoubtedly have learned that Casal is engaged in some patriotic enterprise, either smokeless powder or dirigible balloons! But patience. Poyanne is coming back, and though I don't agree with his ideas, he has some good sense."

In this way the drama of the heart which had been in preparation for several weeks, thanks to Madame de Tillières' silence and her complicated sentiments, suddenly reached an acute crisis through the unpardonable clumsiness of a friend who believed himself to be and was very devoted to her. But how could he have suspected that his application to Poyanne constituted Juliette's greatest danger and prepared the greatest possible suffering for Poyanne himself? Such adventures represent the ransom, sometimes a frightful one, of forbidden happiness. They are but one instance of a thousand of that law, well known to every student of human nature, by which our faults punish themselves through their own success. There is in what we call the natural course of events, something like profound justice which allows us to live our existence according to the taste of our evil desires; then the simple logic of these realized desires inevitably chastises us. Juliette de Tillières and Henry de Poyanne had set themselves for years the task of deceiving

to the best of their ability their intimate friends as to the character of their liaison. They had succeeded. What was there astonishing in the fact that one of these friends, duped like the others, acted according to the sense of his convictions and did to these lovers, whose relations he did not suspect, an irreparable injury? The worst of it was that this terrible d'Avançon, narrating for the fourth time his lamentations about Casal's intrusion at the Rue Matignon, exaggerated the expression of his own thoughts. He had said to Madame de Nançay: "Some day Juliette's name will be mentioned in connexion with these visits"; to Miraut: "I am afraid she will be talked about." He had to tell Poyanne: "I know she is being talked about." He did not even give Madame de Tillières time to anticipate him, so great was the hatred against Raymond in the unoccupied jealous heart of the man of fifty. Poyanne had arrived by train at five in the morning. At eleven d'Avançon, who had been careful to find out about his return, delivered his speech to him—

"There is no one but you, dear friend," he finished up, "who can warn this poor woman of the injury she is doing to her reputation. Now you remember she is always joking me upon my antipathy to the younger men, just as if it extended to men like yourself, Henry! But as a matter of fact the men about town of to-day, it is quite true, are very displeasing to me. It is not that I blame them for enjoying themselves in their youth. My friends and myself enjoy ourselves very much, but we know how to amuse ourselves. We should never have thought of meeting like

these gentlemen without any ladies, to gorge ourselves with food and afterwards roll under the table. These customs may be all right in England. But everything about them to-day comes from London, their vices as well as their clothes. Would you believe that they pretend they can only wear boots made by a man Domas, Somas, Tomas, or something like that is his name, who sends an ambassador like a king every spring across the channel to look after the young swells' boots ? "

The old beau could have kept up for a long while his diatribe against the Anglomania of the young men of the day. Henry de Poyanne was no longer listening to him. He hardly replied, when the other man insisted : "Will you speak to Madame de Tillières ? " and only said : "I will try and find an opportunity." He had just received full in his heart one of those knife thrusts so many heedless hands deliver without knowing at what sensitive spot they are striking : and the victim can only bleed inwardly and be half stifled by the flow of blood from his wound. When d'Avançon had gone, as proud of his diplomacy as if he had been at a congress, he hardly suspected that he had left behind him a man in despair. Had he done so the guilty denouncer would have been less brisk, as he crossed the Seine and went up the Champs Elysées to reach home, meeting as he did so Casal returning from the Bois, riding the quiet Boscard. The young man was talking and laughing with his friend, who was none other than Lord Herbert.

"Enjoy yourself, my friend, enjoy yourself.

That will not prevent," d'Avançon thought as he followed him with his eyes for a considerable distance, just a little envious of his smart appearance, "me from putting a spoke in your wheel. Poyanne will open fire. Juliette cannot guess that I have seen him this morning. I know her. She is so prudent. She was born to be the wife of a diplomat. Her first thought when she finds out she is being talked about will be to arrange for Casal to come less frequently. The animal will get angry, insist like a clumsy fool, and then he will be got rid of. If that method fails, we will find another. I had three ways of getting over Rogister. I am very pleased, though, that I was not mistaken regarding Poyanne. I knew very well that he would see things as they are."

While the unconscious executioner was pronouncing this professional and fatuous monologue, and believing all the while that he was doing his profession honour by his dexterity, his unhappy victim, Poyanne, to whose good sense he had rendered the homage of a connoisseur, paced up and down, a victim of a very keen attack of suffering. The vast room which the Count paced, to disguise by his movement his attack of internal agitation, was a study filled with books from top to bottom of its four walls. The lofty windows opened upon the verdure of the peaceful square garden and the grey mass of the church of Sainte Clotilde. How many times during the last two years had the great orator paced this room with his heart torn by the cruel thought that he was no longer loved, but never with sorrow comparable to that of the morning of

his return! The revelation brought by the diplomat was not, however, very substantial: Madame de Tillières sometimes received the visit of a new friend of whom she had not spoken in her letters. Nothing more. But to the man who loves, facts do not count. Their sentimental significance is everything, and to understand the terrible shock which this must have occasioned in the Count's heart, it is necessary to explain in what moral state he was on the return from his campaign.

In a few months, this strong man, who had weathered such violent storms, had come to experience a feeling of lassitude which he explained by an almost simultaneous series of reverses, not wishing to admit the superstitious term "presentiment." In reality he was at one of those periods of life when everything fails at once, as at others everything succeeds, without there being any need to invoke the great word luck. What is called happiness, in the ordinary sense of luck, results from the exact harmony between our strength and circumstances, almost independent of our will. To borrow a significant example from a very glorious story, Bonaparte's qualities corresponded so precisely with the environment resulting from the Revolution, that at the time all his enterprises must and did have a successful result. After Eylau, in spite of the triumph, it was obvious that there was no longer entire harmony between this genius and the new conditions in Europe. In this way every man traverses the epoch in which he lives, in his private or public life, and is the right man in the right place. Even his faults adapt themselves to the necessities of

position, just as did the imaginative frenzy of the Emperor in France in 1800, entirely to reconstruction. Later and in the period of misfortune, even the qualities of this man turned to his ruin: as did Napoleon's excessive energy in a Europe craving for peace and among soldiers worn out with war. In the proportion in which a modest and regular destiny can compare with a mighty fortune ceaselessly risked amid countless dangers, this had been the political and sentimental history of Henry de Poyanne when after the war the electors of the Doubs had sent him to Parliament and he almost at once met Madame de Tillières. He had to succeed in the House and please the young woman at the same time for the very same reasons which up to then had made him obscure and unhappy. M. Thiers, that fatal genius whom no one could deny without strong views of a keen idea of adaptation, said in his flute-like voice, à propos of the Count's first speech—

"What a pity this young man did not enter the House in 1812!"

Poyanne's best qualities would have found their full scope in the noble and lofty atmosphere of the Restoration. But was it not of a Restoration the France of the day was dreaming, enlightened for a few moments by danger, as to her profound natural instincts? It was a question, we can remember in this hour of sorrow, of labouring for patriotism. Now the Count's disinterestedness, his generous eloquence, the strength and breadth of his principles, the living memory of his personal valour, had suddenly gained for him extraordinary moral authority. At the same time his effort to reconstruct for himself

a useful existence upon the débris of his ruined home gave him that melancholy poesy of character, which is quite irresistible to a woman more romantic than amorous and more tender than passionate. He seemed to be quivering with hidden wounds, vibrating with secret sorrow! Ten years later where was this double triumph? In politics, and after the futile effort of the sixteenth of May, to which he had refused his co-operation because he considered it impossible, what had become of the brilliant orator of Bordeaux and Paris! In Parliament, his refusal and his doctrines of Christian socialism, which grew more pronounced, isolated him amid his own party, and the electors of his district began to weary of a representative whose oratorical successes procured neither a local railway, nor a tobacco department. Pre-occupied solely by his ideas, pursuing his dream of a re-establishment of the Provinces to renew the life of France, and of the proper protection of the life of the working classes by the State, Poyanne had not studied the slow metamorphosis of his constituents when he suddenly hurled himself into the midst of the campaign around the two vacant seats. It was this discovery, rather than private interests, which had decided him to prolong his stay. He had wished conscientiously to traverse the ground covered by his opponents during the last few years, and at the meetings in which he had taken part how heart-breaking it was for him to have to admit that popularity had veered round to one of his fellow-members of the House, a doctor without patients, but a clever writer, who was beginning to apply himself to the mechanical

system of election, by which intellect is cast into slavery by numbers, universal suffrage! Every race which renounces its natural chieftains, those with whom it has grown up, suffered and triumphed through the centuries, gives itself up to the tyranny of charlatans. However strange this fact may appear to the successful man of to-day, the Count had not ceased to believe in the generosity of popular instinct, and the moral degradation of his colleague had wounded him to the quick, just as would have done the sudden news of treachery by his beloved Juliette.

Perhaps under the influence of this cruel disillusionment, he had read her letters with a more susceptible heart during his sad journey, which had resulted in double failure. He had realized, through the correspondence, that there too a change was taking place and that the soul upon which he had rested the whole of his future love might fail him. The letters arrived with great exactitude.

They were in the same elegant and sloping handwriting, the mere sight of which upon the long blue envelope was enough to bring tears to his eyes. It contained the same daily journal of a sweet retired woman, who was also attentive and affectionate. What was there lacking in these lines, and why, instead of finding in them the warmth he used to find, did he recognize, with self-reproach in each line, traces of effort like duty? He dared not complain in his replies, and, as we saw, he wrote good-humoured pages, the letters of a man of action who forced himself to be cheerful as he performed his task, and when once the envelope was fastened down remained for a long time with

his elbow upon the table and his head in his hand gazing into his own heart; and he found there that same painful and timid contraction which had prevented him, on the evening before his departure, from begging of his mistress a real good-bye. Just as at that time, he now stifled words he could not utter and plaints which crushed his soul with a weight of silent melancholy; just as at that time, this noble being, so far removed from the baseness of egoism often found in love's quarrels, sought in himself for the cause which should explain the change in his relations with Madame de Tillières. He accused himself of not loving her for herself. He reproached himself with becoming despotic and displeasing. He formulated plans for such tender, loving conduct towards Juliette, that she would become once more his friend of the past. He applied all the strength of his passion in demonstrating to himself the qualities which made her dear to him. His sorrow then burst forth in unexpressed adoration, and it was at that moment, when receiving her letter of the previous evening, the woman he so idolized said: "How he has changed!" and tried to justify her culpable silence which had been prolonged week after week.

When a soul is full to the brim with the confused elements of sorrow, the least accident determines instantaneous revolutions, like those produced by the passage of an electric current through a vessel containing a mass of unmixed chemical substances. New combinations are produced so rapidly that they seem miraculous. Before his talk with d'Avançon that very morning while in the train travelling towards the city where he would meet

Madame de Tillières again, Henry de Poyanne felt himself incapable of engaging her in a real conversation in which to lay bare the secret agony of her heart. He foresaw months and months of the silence which had been stifling him for so long. The cruel diplomat had not yet turned the corner of the Rue Saint Dominique, and yet now not only did the explanation with Juliette appear possible to the Count, but he felt it to be inevitable. He needed it just as much as he did breathing, walking and eating, so precise and unbearable a shape did the revelation he had just heard give to his doubts as to his mistress' actual sentiments.

The minute after this unexpected conversation he was assailed by a crowd of unreasonable figures of very grievous intensity, like those which often appear to us when a clumsy hand has touched us in a secretly morbid spot. Instead of perceiving these two simple facts, Casal's visits to Juliette, and her silence concerning them, as abstract information requiring interpretation, a vision, as exact as a photograph, appeared to him of the rooms in the Rue Matignon, the little blue and white drawing-room in particular, which was associated in his mind with the memory of his love; that room, with the desk near the window, outside which were the branches of the trees in the garden, and in this delicate casket so beloved by him appeared as a guest the detestable man Casal, whose character he had learned in the house of poor Pauline de Corcieux. The appearance of this man in such a place inflicted upon him a sensation of torture which was increased by the picture of Juliette resting, as she used to do, upon her favourite

lounge in the chimney corner, talking to the visitor, and then in the evening sitting down to her desk to write to him, Poyanne, though maintaining a discreet silence concerning her odious visitor for she could be quite sure that his visits were objectionable to her lover. The scene which had preceded his departure for Besançon returned suddenly to the unhappy man's mind. He could hear the words he uttered that evening and Juliette's look came back to his memory. Oh God! was it possible for that to conceal an untruth. In the eddying of these painful visions the Count felt so miserable that with tears in his eyes and a succession of sobs he threw himself upon the sofa in his study, and this brave soldier, this manly orator, this sincere optimist began to groan like a child.

"Ah! how could she?" he repeated through his tears. Suddenly as he said these words aloud, a wave of recollection froze his heart. He remembered that he had uttered exactly the same words thirteen years before on the day he had learnt of his wife's deception. The analogy of these two crises forced itself upon him with such power that his excessive suffering produced a reaction. There are, in moral order, sudden bursts of energy which are a form of instinct of preservation, as spontaneous as physical movements at times of extreme danger, for example, the gesture with which a drowning man clutches at a piece of floating wreckage. Our sentiments do not die in us without struggling with all their vigour. His passionate love lived too deep down in the Count's heart for it not to struggle in its agony, and this

love revolted against a judgment which likened to his infamous wife the mistress who had been for so many years the object of his fervent adoration. Poyanne rose from the sofa ; he passed his hands over his face, and he spoke still in loud tones and with a fierce intonation—

"No, no, it is not true."

The idea which he was thus almost savagely putting away from his thoughts was the hypothesis, which had suddenly intervened and caused him a shudder of horror, that Juliette was Casal'smistress. It was enough for him to picture to himself, in the flash of a second, this vision of shame, for his soul to at once reject the thought with that ardour of negation in the case of a woman's faults which is the happy privilege of chaste and faithful men. It is not the fact of having been betrayed, but of being unfaithful himself, which makes a man prompt to suspect. The Count's belief in Madame de Tillières' honour was absolute, because his conduct to her had been irreproachable, and he judged her unwittingly from his own standard. This profound faith he found quite intact in spite of his suffering, and he strained every nerve not to admit the injurious degrading thought which had passed through his noble mind. The internal clock of our faculties is so equipped that a swing of the pendulum at once sets it going, and in this way the movement of wounded sensibility awakened in this man, who had given way to despair, the power of his will—

"Come," he said to himself, "I must think." He began to pace up and down the room, but this time intent upon a lucid analysis, as if he were pre-

paring for the House one of those speeches for which he was famous. In persons subject to the civilization of to-day—in d'Avançon, and d'Accragne we have already had instances—a man's profession resumes its control over him as soon as the first shock is over. A literary man, therefore, thinks like a literary man, an actor like an actor, a debater like Henry de Poyanne thinks as a debater, with the inflexibility of a logic which applies to the trifles of the heart just as well as to a political problem, and almost in the same terms—

"Yes, let me think," the Count said to himself, "and first of all confine the question within its limits. First of all she must have seen Casal often, very often. D'Avançon gave me to understand that it was daily. Does he not exaggerate? What is his testimony worth? He is a judicious fellow but very passionate. Very well. His passion even, of its kind, is an argument for his thesis. As he came here this morning he must have waited for my arrival. Therefore, he must have been very disturbed. We will admit that fact, and then examine it thoroughly. Juliette has seen Casal many times since my departure, a man whom she did not know a few weeks ago, though she is a woman who is very careful with whom she makes friends, and always finds out my opinion of the man first. There can only be two reasons for this conduct: either he pleases her, why not? He pleased poor Pauline very much. Or else she is bored and receives him as a distraction. After him will come many others. It is the beginning of the transformation of her life. Very well! We will look clearly into these two reasons."

These were the phrases, followed by twenty similar ones, by which this intelligence, which had recovered its self-control, had the courage to review the situation: either reason made his heart bleed. That Juliette should allow herself to be ensnared by a sentimental comedy, acted by Casal, or that she received this fellow simply to distract herself, was the sign in either case of her profound weariness of everything connected with her liaison with Henry. She knew him so well that she was silent as to his visits. The explanation of her silence appeared to the Count obvious.

"She pities me," he thought; and the idea increased his martyrdom, just as it has done the martyrdom of every one who has experienced that pity when they feel their passion muttering within them. An instinct warns them that hate, perfidy, estrangement and even cruel desertion leave in a lover room for hope; but pity leaves none. A woman who has wished to kill you perhaps will fall into your arms after stabbing you; she who has been seduced by an insiduous rival will perhaps return, mad with remorse, and so will the woman who has yielded in your absence to the attraction of debauchery. But the mistress who feels pity for her lover's heart-aches, which she no longer shares, the disenchanted friend who would like to effect a gradual cure, like her own, of the delightful fever of sentiment, a man must never expect to love him again as he loves her. Shun that terrible goodness which does not even allow a man to feast upon his own suffering! Beg her to be cruel, to dismiss you, to brutalize you even to death! She would be less harsh to you, then,

than she is in sparing you by her murderous caresses, each one of which proves to you what you have lost by forfeiting the love of such a tender creature. Henry de Poyanne tasted in imagination the profound bitterness of this cruel charity, and it hurt him so that he said: "Anything, even a rupture, rather than that." From that moment he ceased to hesitate, and when at two o'clock he reached the Rue Matignon, his determination to know everything was as firm as had been his resolve to enter the army at the outbreak of the war. What would he discover? A deadly shudder ran through him at the thought that the mouth he loved so dearly might perhaps say to him: "It is true, I have ceased to love you." But to a certain degree of doubt, the certainty, however horrible, appears preferable to that heart darkness in which one is ignorant of the being one adores, and d'Avançon's conversation had suddenly tuned this man, who was already suffering, to this pitch. In the four hours between his conversation with the diplomat and his entry into the Louis XVI drawing-room, he had been able to gauge the depth of the open wound in his soul. So, too, was wounded the soul of the woman to whom he was about to display his misery; but why had he, by his silence, allowed things to come to the point where explanations only showed the irreparable faults of the past?

At the moment when the door opened to admit Henry, Madame de Tillières was sitting upon one of her two easy chairs, perhaps the same one which had listened to the words of parting between her grandmother and the cruel Alexander de Tilly a hundred years ago. There was to be sure

no similarity between noble Poyanne and the cynical seducer of the famous Memoirs. But however despairing was the grandmother, she was not more so than her granddaughter in 1871, although the May sun was shining brightly and the blue sky and the trees, already green, were visible through the windows. Juliette had ordered the fire to be lighted. Wearing a clinging dress, long and white, her worn pallor, her eyes heavy from insomnia, and her drawn mouth gave the impression that she was suffering from an internal chill which no spring could warm. The Count took her hand to kiss it; he felt the little hand moist with emotion tremble in his own. Finding thus worn and ill the woman he had come to question like a judge, the wretched man forgot for a moment his own sufferings. The sight of the drawn and wasted features of the face he loved so well gripped his heart. A facial detail completed his agitation by revealing to him his mistress' distress. Juliette's blue eyes looked almost black as they did in moments of intense nervous trouble when the swollen iris almost filled her eyes. What secret cause of suffering was torturing the sensitive creature to the depths of her soul? This question Poyanne involuntarily asked himself, and it was impossible not to connect her visible suffering with the unknown sentiments which d'Avançon's denunciation had shown him in his friend of ten years' standing. Although very rapid, these thoughts changed his expression, and Madame de Tillières on his entrance realized in her anxiety that he had come to ask for an explanation. But on what subject? As he had only arrived that

morning, he could not have heard of Casal's visits. Besides, she had made up her mind when lying awake the previous night that she would tell him of these visits at their first meeting. But that necessitated him being in an open and indulgent frame of mind, and he was obviously quite the opposite. Without a doubt the fault lay in the letters he had received at Besançon. Hardly during the last week had she found sufficient energy to write a few lines on similar paper to that upon which she used to write pages and pages.

While these thoughts were in the minds of both of them, they began to talk, and they uttered these commonplaces, which are like the few passes fencers exchange before commencing in deadly earnest. Poyanne sat down, and after a few affectionate inquiries, they both uttered phrases like these punctuated by silence—

"I am very pleased," he said, "to hear that Madame de Nançay's health has given you no anxiety. But with this lovely weather——"

"Yes," she replied, "for once in a way we have had a real month of April."

"How are the Candales?"

"They are going on better. She has been most interested in your campaign!"

"Yes, I have completely failed."

"You will make up for that by a triumph in the House."

Good God! How far away was the old mother, the young Countess, spring and Parliament from their cares! How bitter a thing is, too, when not a delightful thing, a talk like this after a long absence between two persons who can neither avoid

it, explain themselves, nor endure it; and they recoil at the moment when they ought to receive and bury in their bleeding hearts the truth's keen point. Even this waiting becomes intolerable, and one decides to speak, just as Juliette did with a tremor through her being. She took Poyanne's hand. Simply but with a forced smile and almost supplicating look she said to him—

"You are sad, Henry, I can see. You are annoyed at the hurried letters I have written you during the last few days. But if you knew how I have suffered, and am still suffering, you would forgive me. You would not increase my suffering by the sight of your own. Must I tell you again that I have never been able and cannot bear to see you unhappy?"

Her gesture, her words and the look accompanying them were sincere, profoundly sincere! Right through the half-hour which their talk had lasted, during which not a word of reproach had been pronounced by Poyanne, she felt that this man was suffering, and the sensation which had formerly been the first principle of her love, lived in her to a depth she did not suspect. All the cords of romantic charity formerly touched by the Count's melancholy confidences began to vibrate once more in her heart. It was a reawakening of her sentiments, unexpected, unpremeditated and irresistible. If Henry de Poyanne had retained the strength to combine with precision the various effects of this interview as capital for the future of his liaison, he would not have employed any other method than that of displaying his grief. Months ago, on the contrary, he believed himself clever in wearing

a mask of semi-indifference. Now he no longer reasoned, he was about to become to Juliette the superior and unhappy being whom she had pitied with enough passion to fall in love, thanks to the mysterious tie which unites pity to tenderness and consoling sympathy to the troubles of pleasure. The passion was dead, so the love had also died. Her dream of happiness was now directed towards another, but the magnetism of pity which had bound her to Poyanne still existed. She submitted to it without even trying to defend herself. At that actual moment she was quite incapable, as she had just told him with real simplicity, of bearing the sufferings of this man who could not now suffice for her happiness. As for him in his sorrowful meditations, that was the pity he had feared with the greatest horror. Therefore his face contracted still more. He dropped Madame de Tillières' hand as he answered—

"Ah! Juliette, do not wrong me. I have never measured your letters by their pages. I loved them so that I believed them to be an outpouring of your heart rather than a duty.

"Ungrateful wretch," the young woman interrupted in a tone of tender coquetry, "who would ever suspect me of writing to you!"

"Well, yes," Poyanne went on with a visible effort at self-control, "I prefer to talk to you freely. Yes, your letters have pained me. Not because they were hurried or short, but I gathered something from them which I have since found out, and which made me understand that you were not opening your heart to me. You sent them to me as a journal of your life, and you did not tell me

that you were engaged in forming a new friendship, but I have discovered it in the few hours I have been in Paris. People are so concerned about you! The thing that has wounded me so deeply is the fact of your concealing this from me."

Their eyes met, while the Count formulated with implacable clearness the accusation upon having to meet which Madame de Tillières had reckoned, but only at her own time. She knitted her brows and a wave of red swept over her face. Poyanne had, in those few words, put himself before her, not only as a sufferer, but also as a judge, and at once pride mingled with sympathy in her tender but proud woman's heart. She replied with a touch of hauteur—

"Not at all, Henry. I have never intended to conceal anything from you. There are certain things which I would rather tell you than write about. I know how easy a misunderstanding can arise from letters. Question and you shall judge."

"Friend," the Count murmured in a melancholy tone without a shade of reproach in it, "how little you understand me! I question you? I judge you? What words between you and me, Juliette! I beg of you not to look upon me in the light of a jealous lover. I am not that. I have no right to be one. I esteem you too much to suspect you. May I once, as I love you, be allowed to criticize your friends? I might be afraid that you would regret some day receiving this person or that person, but distrust you on that account!—never! But the fact that you sat down at your desk to write to me and weighed each phrase of your letter instead of simply putting down

what your heart dictated; that you treated me like a person to be treated with consideration; that you are afraid of me, and that I can feel it to be the case, these are the things which pierce my heart, as do phrases like those you have just uttered upon possible misunderstandings between us. You see it is not from the actions themselves that my sufferings come, but from what I guess, from what I see at the back of it all. I see that your feelings have changed. I see—ah, let me continue," he insisted as Madame de Tillières made a gesture, "for this idea has obsessed me for so long now—I see that the intimacy between us is ended, the heart to heart existence, which has become a habit so dear to me. I see that I love you still, but that you have ceased to love me. The trifling fact of the new friendship and your silence concerning it is an almost infallible sign. If I have taken this opportunity to speak to you as I am doing, understand that I attach no more importance to it than to many others. There is nothing important to me, Juliette, but your heart, so if I am no longer to you what I have been I implore you to have the courage to tell me so. I have this one question to ask you. Do you still love me? I can understand it all now. You say you cannot bear to see me unhappy. It is this terrible doubt which causes all my suffering. Put an end to it. To lose you even would be less cruel than not to know what you desire or what your sentiments are."

She listened to him as he spoke to her in a voice which grew more and more broken and mournful and betrayed—even more than his words—his internal suffering. She saw, leaning towards her

with an expression of infinite anguish upon it, this sorrowful face which looked poor and mean at ordinary times, but was now transfigured by the charm of a great grief. She realized that which she had doubted for months—perhaps she had been glad to doubt—that Poyanne was speaking the truth, that his love for her was very deeply rooted, and she experienced the unbearable physical impression that by replying she no longer loved him, she would actually rend his sorrowing heart. The attitude of pride she had adopted at his accusing question, how could she maintain in the face of his tender despair, which put a weapon into his hands and said to her, "Strike." No. She could not strike. She could not articulate a phrase which would have given her freedom, by completing the destruction of this man who had loved her and still did so. She had given herself to him to make him happy, and she found him so wretched and so badly wounded in her presence and by her! Her unconscious desire for a renewed existence which had led to her dangerous relations with Casal, her secret revolt against the ties of her liaison, her wish to maintain her independence on the day of the explanation, her weariness and her need for liberty—all the changes which had taken place in her during the last few weeks, what were they compared to the agony, which had suddenly seized and overwhelmed his soul? Now spontaneously tears stood in her eyes, she got up and falling on her knees in front of her friend she put her arms around his neck, just as she would have done to a sick child, without reflection or reasoning; then trembling and bewildered by the

shock the man who suddenly passed from extreme anxiety to unhoped-for joy, could only stammer—

"You are crying? You still love me? No, it is not possible? You love me? You love me?"

"Do you not feel it?" Juliette replied through her tears. Come, I don't want you to have, ever again, a single moment like that. Why did you not speak before? Why did you write to me frigid letters as well? But it is all over. Forget your sorrow. Till this moment I did not know what you were to me. I belong to you for life. I swear to you that I will never again see the man you detest. Be quiet. I swear it. You shall never again speak to me on the subject. You will believe me when I tell you that I did not see him for myself, but for a friend whom he loves. But it shall never, never, happen again, you understand? Never! I want you to be happy, and not distrust yourself, myself or our love; and I want our life to begin again as before. When shall we meet at home? To-morrow. Shall we? Smile at me, look at me with eyes which betray your joy. You are my dear, dear friend!"

It was now her turn to listen, and she could see his suffering face light up in esctasy. She was lying—but was it lying?—in saying that she loved him, and at that moment she was as agitated as if she did love him. But she knew very well that in giving him to understand, as she had done, that Casal was only received in the Rue Matignon for the sake of some one else, she was committing an action unworthy of her. She knew it, or ought to have known it, and also that in offering, in imploring him to meet her at their little nest at Passy, she was forfeiting her woman's dignity.

What did it matter to her, provided that she escaped from the terrible agony of his sorrows. But he, proving how deeply he had been wounded, asked—

"Swear to me that you are speaking the truth to me like this out of love for me."

"I swear it," she replied.

"You see," he went on, "without this love I do not know what I should become. You tell me I ought to have spoken before. But it is so hard not to be understood when one is in love! Be sure that you are quite free. You might have answered me just now that you no longer wished to be mine, and I should not have reproached you; I believe that, if you had, I should have died just as if from suffocation. But you are right. It is all over. But I think for the joy that fills my heart to-day, I would undergo much more suffering. How happy I am! How happy I am!"

"Is that really true?" she asked almost in bewilderment.

"Yes, very true," he repeated as he pressed her dear head to him without noticing how the eyes, which had just gazed at him with such exaltation, suddenly darkened at a vision which the poor woman tried with all her might to banish, for she returned her lover's kiss with a passion which would have sufficed to dispel Henry's final doubt, had he retained any. This man was too young, in spite of his age and experience, too entirely loyal and simple, to suspect that this passionate movement was caused by horrible remorse suddenly experienced by his mistress. She had just felt that in throwing herself in a frenzy of charity into Poyanne's arms she could not forget the other.

CHAPTER VIII

DUALISM

WHEN Henry de Poyanne had gone with the promise of a meeting on the following day at the rooms at Passy, Madame de Tillières experienced first of all a strange feeling of calm, the calm of exhaustion following a decisive explanation. It lasted till she became conscious of her troubled heart. She dressed as usual for her afternoon drive. Then after she had entered her carriage and given her coachman the address of the dressmaker who was expecting her, her sadness was so great that the idea of trying on was odious to her and the thought of the trifling purchases she had planned seemed more than she could bear. Before even the horse had turned the corner of the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré she had changed her route and told her coachman—

"Drive to the Bois."

It often happened in the spring when the sky was as on that day, perfectly clear and blue, that in order to enjoy a solitary walk she drove like this to the part of the Bois between the second lake, the racecourse at Auteil and the Seine. She selected a roundabout way to get there in order to prevent a meeting with her friends, and avoided their usual route. She took the Avenue de l'Impératrice and then drove along beside the fortifications. There are to be found, with occasional views of

far-away Meudon, the least frequented walks in this beautiful forest. About three o'clock the network of rides reserved for horsemen is deserted; hardly even an eccentric individual is to be seen. Here Madame de Tillières loved to walk, followed by her carriage which she could see in the distance through the trees, and there isolated, but in perfect safety, she gave herself up in silence to the sensations of real nature so rare in Paris. She watched the leaves of the trees, and the flowers in the grass at her feet. She could see the blue sky and listen to the birds singing just as she used to do when as a thoughtful child she wandered through the wild park at Nançay. At certain spots large Scotch pines raised their dark green, tops, in which the wind produced a noise which, with closed eyes, might have convinced any one of the proximity of the sea. Sometimes the young woman sat down upon an unoccupied seat. Locomotive whistles sounded through space, and the vague murmur of the noise of carriages betokened that implacable life was going on around her, though she had forgotten it, and herself as well. A pleasant but confused reverie took possession of her in which her thoughts were mingled with the charms of spring around her; and this place, but a short distance from the Arc, was to her an oasis of peace and freshness, as retired as the loneliest valley near her distant country home.

Peace and reverie were what Juliette was in the habit of seeking and finding in her walks, and she returned from them more serious still and more resigned to the acceptance of her lot. It does not

require a philosopher to listen to the soothing advice of the trees and flowers. It is sufficient not to close one's heart to the harmony of things and to feel them without reasoning. But there are also times when nature, instead of advising us to submit, seems to urge us to revolt through the irony of the display of such serenity in the midst of our own troubles. They do not simply say, the leaves bathed in light, the songs of the birds and the petals of the flowers, abandon yourself to instinct. That was the price of our felicity." But on the other hand when duty bids us to stifle, to overcome this instinct of happiness, the May sky, the gladsome verdure, the bright daylight all heighten in us the punishment of the passion we have fought against. If Madame de Tillières after her talk with Poyanne had hoped that this walk would soothe her nerves into tranquillity, how greatly was she mistaken. As she walked along paths shaded by fresh foliage, instead of the peaceful dreams which usually enveloped her, her attention was occupied by the cruel idea that after her talk she must absolutely shut her door to Casal. She must do it because of her promise unless Poyanne freed her from it. But not absolving her from it was accepting it. She must do so because sooner or later if she did not the two men would meet at her house, and the mere thought of the look they would exchange made her tremble. She must do it because she was Poyanne's mistress, and she wished to remain faithful to him. Seeing Casal, now she could no longer deceive herself, was disloyalty—because she loved him!

Yes, she loved him. The evidence of this,

against which her unhappy mind had struggled in vain for days, obtruded itself upon her by the almost maddening sorrow which at this moment the thought alone of this necessary separation inflicted upon her. She loved him? How was it, then, that her love had not been bold enough to inspire her with the courage to set herself free by accepting Poyanne's offer and by uttering the "I have ceased to love you," which he asked her to say? But she could not have uttered this phrase with sincerity, since the sensation of her lover's suffering was powerful enough to paralyze her new love and her impulse towards happiness! What mad disorder of her sensibility made her at that moment live for these two men at the same time? The whole current of her being bore her towards one, but to reach him she had to trample upon the other and this she could not do. She had just submitted with a terrible struggle which had made her thoroughly understand herself to the dictatorship of sorrow exercised over her by the man to whom she had belonged of her own free will for years, and she could never, never shake it off. She could see Henry's eyes and hear his voice. Pity overwhelmed her again at the recollection. Was it even pity? When it is a case of pity for any one, the person who experiences the feeling remains calm or at least has a life apart from the suffering which he does not feel, instead of as in Juliette's case at contact with the agony of soul she had perceived in the look on the face and in the words of her lover, feeling a mortal dread enter her soul and her heart. The energy of personal existence had suddenly dried up in her, and yet she loved Raymond! She could

see him, too, with his clear eyes, his smile, his noble face, with the charm which emanated from his slightest gesture, and, without her suspecting it, had minute by minute for weeks intoxicated her, and the idea of breaking with him altogether was to her like the thought of entering into the darkness and chill of the tomb. She loved him with some strange unhealthy love which was not capable of entirely abolishing her old affection. It was love however. If she had doubted it, the sorrow which overwhelmed her on that Spring afternoon would have convinced her of it. At that hour she felt that she had a soul full of tenderness, eyes full of tears, and a mad desire to have Raymond there with her, in order that she might be permitted a look at him and lean upon his arm. The warm languor of the atmosphere, the aroma which the invisible flowers spread in the breeze, the softness of the sky at this divine season, all combined to create that dream of happiness, which sometimes delights us and at others makes us sad, and she now evoked Casal to abandon herself to the dream, and now Poyanne to resist it, made desperate as she was by the inexplicable almost monstrous dualism which tore her asunder. She attached herself with all her strength to the resolution of fidelity to her first love, which in women of certain class is like an honour and the absolution of their fault. Contrary to the aphorism of the moralist it is not an uncommon thing for a woman to only have one lover in her life. It is a very uncommon thing if she has had two lovers for her not to have many more. It is in the passing of the unique passion to the second weak-

ness that fades never to be renewed, the flower of her own esteem of which a proud creature has as much need as of the air she breathes and of the bread she eats.

"No," Madame de Tillières repeated, "I am Henry's wife. I have given myself to him for life. Even if I were indifferent to his sufferings, I owe it to him to remain faithful to him. I am not responsible for my feelings. I am for my actions. I want to be strong and will be," she insisted: and she exerted all her energy in dominating the excessive distress which suddenly overwhelmed her soul till she resumed telling herself, finding a pleasure in mentally employing a Christian name her mouth had never uttered—

"I shall never see Raymond again!"

After walking for two hours during which time she tried by physical movement to allay the anxiety which devoured her, Juliette at last re-entered her carriage, having at least fixed her wandering thoughts on a positive resolution. She did not feel that she had sufficient strength to herself tell Casal that she could not and would not receive him again. To close her door in his face without explanation was an unqualifiable proceeding and one he had not deserved. She then thought of asking Gabrielle de Candale to beg the young man not to call at the Rue Matignon again under the simple pretext that bad accounts of him had reached Madame de Nançay and caused a difficulty between Juliette and her mother? She did not see the awkwardness of this scheme till she had laid it before her friend on whom she called on her return from the Bois.

"You know I will do what you want me, but

will he believe that reason ?" Gabrielle answered with a shake of the head.

"Whether he believes it or not," Juliette replied, "he will understand that I do not want him to call, and he is too *galant* to try to force his way in."

"He loves you," Gabrielle replied.

"Don't say that," Madame de Tillières nervously interrupted; "you ought not to say that."

"But, my dear, it is to show you that he is likely to want an explanation."

"Ah well!" Juliette went on in a dull voice, "I shall have to tell him what you have already told him,"

"Are you sure you have the courage?" the Countess asked.

"Ah!" Juliette said, hiding her face in her hands, "you see you no longer believe in me, now that I have admitted everything to you. How quickly your esteem for me has departed."

"I," cried Madame de Candale, kissing her friend, "I no longer believe in you? I have ceased to esteem you? On the contrary never before yesterday did I realize how much I loved you. If you only knew how I thought of you all night, how I trembled at the idea of your interview with Poyanne, how anxiously I was waiting for you to come? No longer esteem you? Why? Because my fatal imprudence did not guess the secret which made you so rebellious when I introduced you to this new friend? For I was the cause of your knowing him. But it is quite true now, I am afraid," she added as she noted the infinite distress in Juliette's eyes. "No, don't listen to me, I am mad. I promise to be clever and save you from his visit. He will not suspect the

intimacy for which you are sacrificing yourself. He will not therefore be jealous. He has not the least idea of your feelings for him. He will not dare to violate your defence. Besides next week or the week after let us both go away to Nançay or Candale, shall we? I will watch over you like a sister. I will pet you. I will spoil you. But I beg you never again to say that I love you less!"

"How good it is to hear you talk like that!" Leaning her head upon her friend's shoulder she added—

"This is the only place in the world where I do not suffer. I want you so much to tell me that I am not a monster!"

This sigh, which escaped from the depths of a soul which was a prey to the most grievous of moral troubles—those troubles of which we are ashamed when we are dying—would always remain in Madame de Candale's memory. Never more would she let drop, even from thoughtlessness, a single phrase like that which her anxiety had just now torn from her, in which Juliette could suppose mistrust of her character. But the dear Countess in vain lavished tender and sympathetic consolation upon her poor friend, for she had shown too clearly in a word that the latter was no longer quite the same woman to her. Only in her manner of pronouncing the name of Poyanne, in the visible effort the two syllables cost her, the proud pure Gabrielle had put, unknown to herself, something which had pierced a suffering heart, in which now everything caused a wound. Her adorable petting was powerless to entirely destroy the impression, so that in multiplying assurances of the success of her mission to Casal, she

did not succeed in destroying the effect of her first exclamation. "But will he believe that reason?"

Instead of leaving the Rue de Tilsitt, at least soothed by the putting into practice of the plan she had conceived, Madame de Tillières returned home still more agitated and miserable: and it is necessary to state that a culpable hope had already entered her mind which terrified her like a crime. Really she had been quite determined in her resolve never to admit Raymond, and quite sincere in her attitude with Gabrielle. But she could not help herself desiring that her friend's first idea should be realized, and that the young man should try and have a definite and direct interview with her. By a strange deviation, which caused her terrible remorse, she felt an irresistible need in the hour of separation to be quite certain that he really loved her. Was it not a very natural inconsistency in a heart which did not entirely accept itself! Does it not happen like this every time we separate from an idolized creature for motives foreign to love, pride, interest, or nobility? What love has sacrificed a beloved mistress even to an imperious duty, and been able to forgive her if she has consoled herself very quickly? Vanity does not alone come into play in this strange sentiment. Passion shows itself in the openness of its invincible egoism, and Juliette could not understand that, when after her visit to Madame de Candale, she found herself less strong against her passion, through the influence of a moral phenomenon which could dominate the cruel sufferings of her soul and madden her with constant contradictions. Divided, as she was, between two incompatible sentiments, it was in-

evitable that she should always abandon herself in imagination to the one she had as a fact sacrificed, the more so because the sentiment attaching her to Poyanne was quite a negative one and incapable of giving her any pleasure. With what remorse she proved it during that night and the following morning! She had not been able to bear this man to suffer for her. To spare him that suffering she had resolved to devote herself to him entirely body and soul, and now she saw that his anxiety was allayed she had no thought save for the other. Was she a monster, as she had said to her friend in her supreme anguish?

Ah! on the next morning when for the first time for so long, she went to the rooms at Passy to meet her lover, what a shudder of inexpressible fright she retained for days and days afterwards! How many times did she see herself arriving at the house and entering the room decorated with flowers by the Count as if he were a lover of twenty-five, and the rest! These mysterious walls were the theatre of a very commonplace drama, which is played every night in hundreds of marriage beds in which wives, having a love hidden away in their hearts, submit from a sense of duty to husbands whom they often hate with mortal hatred. Generally the interest which drives them to this surrender is so strong in them that it drowns their hate, disgust and even sadness. It is a question of making the husband accept the paternity of another man's child, of soothing his jealous suspicions, or simply of settling a very heavy dressmaker's bill. What matters it to them that they lend their bodies for pleasures they do not share when they have in

their minds a forbidden pleasure, which makes them beforehand forget this labour of the senses, so hideous when it is not intoxicating. It is to be found, too, among those women who, though they love a man other than their husband, have wished to keep the oath they have sworn, and have not yielded to their love. They have set their pride to conceal their heart even from the man who has captured it. They continue to be submissive wives, with the cancer of an internal passion devouring them. Women like these, martyrs of honour and love, if any of them read this story of a long and cruel tragedy of the mind they will really understand the attack of melancholy of which Juliette was the victim before, during and after her rendezvous. She had been the first to suggest it, and she returned from it without being able to deceive the man she wished to make happy at so great a cost to herself. For the Count made use of a phrase to her, as they were about to separate, which pierced her heart like a keen blade.

"Repeat to me that in coming here you came for yourself and not for me."

"For me, for you?" she said with a trembling smile. "Do I distinguish your happiness from my own? What idea have you now?"

"Ah!" he said, "your look is so sad! I know your eyes so well."

"They are the eyes of a friend who is ill," she went on with a shrug of her fine shoulders in which the conquered grace of the suffering creature who can struggle no more was displayed; "it is nothing at all. When shall I see you? To-morrow? Will you come to the Rue Matignon at two o'clock?"

"Agreed," Poyanne said as he drew her to him with a caressing gesture. "You are right. I am an anxious fellow, a maniac, a madman. If you did not love me, why should you be here? Forgive me."

"Forgive him?" thought Juliette in the carriage which was taking her home a few minutes later. "Poor fellow, and so delicate! He at least must never suspect me. I owe that to him. My life is entirely his. Before my conscience I have married him. How difficult it is for me to hide my feelings from him! He loves me. Yes, how he loves me." Then her thoughts unconsciously wandered in another direction. She thought of Casal. "He too loves me, or thinks he loves me. He believes it. In a fortnight he will have forgotten our few weeks' pleasant friendship. He will resume his life of pleasure. When my name is mentioned in his presence he will say to himself: 'Ah, yes, little Madame de Tillières to whom I began to make love. Then her mother interfered. Now it is all over.' My beautiful dream, too, of exerting a good influence over him, of taking him away from his dissolute life, of making him appreciate his own worth, of preventing him sinking still lower! At least I shall have proved that honourable women exist, and do not say what they don't mean. His behaviour has been simple and perfect in my presence! Honourable women? My God, if he knew." She felt she was blushing beneath her veil at the very idea as she sat in the corner of the carriage: "No, I could not explain to him. Yet if Henry had been free there would not have been a word

to be said against me, and what I am doing proves it to myself! That ought to suffice."

She repeated these and similar phrases when she reached home. She had not managed to overcome that sort of obsession which now constrained her to think of Casal in a vision of the clearness and intensity of reality. The reasoning and feeling sides of our souls are not the same. In vain Juliette proved to herself as her relations with the young man were entirely broken off for good, that she ought to forget him, still all the force of her imagination was engaged, at the approach of the time when she knew he would be calling in the Rue de Tilsitt, in representing to herself his acts and gestures. "Midday. He will have returned from the Bois, and found Gabrielle's note if he did not get it in the morning. He will be wondering what she has to say to him. He will perhaps think it concerns the projected party on Lord Herbert's steam yacht." At the thought of this trip, which she could not now join, a picture of blue water, clear sky and green hills intruded into Madame de Tillières' reverie with a thought of the hours of gentle pleasant conversation during the boat's steady movement with the stream.

"What are you thinking about?" her mother asked, as she sat facing her at lunch. "Have you any trouble?"

"My dear mother, what an idea!" she answered, trembling as if the old lady's clear eyes could read her heart. In vain she forced herself to talk, smile, and pet her observant mother, who shook her white head in silence as she noticed how her daughter's face had changed. Now it looked

smaller and wasted. What mysterious malady had attacked those eyes which showed signs of insomnia, or those cheeks on which traces of tears seemed to remain? Was Juliette secretly nursing an unhealthy sentiment? For the noble pious Madame de Nançay was quite as incapable of suspecting her daughter of a fault or of remorse, as she would have been of consoling her if she had found out the truth. Her mother's absolute confidence in her was another grief to Juliette, even at the time when she had so many bleeding wounds, and with self-reproach she withdrew into solitude. There at least she could give herself up to the whirl of her thoughts. That morning in particular it was an infinite solace to her to retire to her little drawing-room, and with eyes fixed upon the clock, to resume that observing calculation of the minutes and seconds by which from a distance we associate ourselves with the smallest gestures of those we love when we are unable to be near them, to live their life and share their sensations.

"Half-past one! He is at the Rue de Tilsitt. Gabrielle receives him upstairs in the room which ought to recall many pleasant memories to him. They will never return. She is talking to him. Good gracious! suppose he thinks I am afraid to tell him myself. No. He will take it as a sign of indifference. Alas! But will he believe it? He is listening. Who knows? Without a doubt it was only sport on his part, and Gabrielle's words will make no difference. No, he loved me, and the reason he never said so was one of respect. What a delicacy of heart, in spite of his life! What will he become now? Ah! how hard it is!"

Then, after one of those unconscious meditations, in which our whole being goes away from us into that of another, and from which we awake as from a morbid dream, she went on quickly—

"A quarter past two. It is all over. Provided Gabrielle has no other visitors and can come at once to tell me. . . . There is a ring at the bell. . . . The door is being opened. . . . It can only be her."

Madame de Tillières had in fact taken the precaution to say she was not at home to any one but Madame de Candale. Therefore it was a surprise which almost made her faint when the footman ushered in the visitor, Casal himself. She had got up to run towards Gabrielle. The shock occasioned by the young man's unexpected presence was so violent that she had to resume her seat. Her legs gave way under her. In spite of her custom to control her feelings, and the fact that at this moment it was to her own advantage to hide her agitation, she felt herself turn pale, then blush, and her voice failed her. It was a deep satisfaction to her in her emotion to observe that Casal was no less moved than she was herself. The step he had ventured upon had taken away his presence of mind for the commencement of the conversation. Obviously on his entrance to the little drawing-room, he was neither the seducer, the man of the world, nor the fop spoiled by his easy conquests. He was merely a lover with the spontaneousness of sincere passion. If Juliette had thought he was acting a comedy with her, his attitude at this moment would have undeceived her. The most peculiar thing in real love, and

women know it by instinct, is that it suffers from its triumph if the triumph brings sorrow to the victim of it. Instead of having in his eyes a gleam of pride at the young woman's confusion, giving him such a favourable opportunity for a declaration, this Parisian with all the experiences of gallantry at his fingers' ends had the agitated appearance of a young man afraid of his own audacity, and more afraid of displeasing and wounding than hopeful of success.

"Forgive me, madam," he said, after a short silence, "for forcing an entry by the use of Madame de Candale's name. I have come from her house, and I wanted to speak to you at once. Perhaps what I have to say is of a nature, if not to justify, at least to explain my indiscretion. But if you desire me to withdraw and postpone this talk till such time as will suit you I am ready to obey."

He spoke in a humble almost timid voice. Madame de Tillières had found time to recover herself and the courage to look at him. Whether the sincere attitude touched her heart, whether she did not desire to appear afraid of the conversation, or whether she yielded to the profound attraction of his presence, which is the root of every weakness in a love affair, she did not act as she ought to have done, to have been logical in the rôle she had assumed. It was so easy to reply: "Gabrielle has told you what I shall myself tell you," and add a word of censure upon his visit which would have rendered a repetition impossible. Instead of that she heard herself answer the young man with the little phrase so commonplace in its terms but so full of danger at that time—

"Well, sir, I must confess that after what Madame de Candale has said to you, I did not expect you. But there is no reason why I should refuse to listen and reply to you if, as I suppose, it is on the subject of the somewhat delicate commission with which I entrusted Gabrielle."

"Yes, madam," the young man went on in firmer tones, as he sat down. "You are quite right, that is the subject; and first of all allow me to repeat the answer I made the Countess just now. You have—need I insist?—no resistance to fear from me the moment you express a desire similar to the one transmitted to me. I understand the scruples you are obeying, and however hard it may be for me, I approve of them. I will repeat it to you and give you my word that this visit will be the last, if you persevere in your decision after listening to me. I shall have only one reproach to make you, if the fault is not obvious to me and I have not known the way to make you appreciate the degree of my respect of my cult for you. I should have liked you to speak to me yourself, rather than to have employed a third party, even Madame de Candale. You would have spared me this indiscretion, for I should have at once said what I have desired for many days to say."

"Ah well!" Juliette replied with a smile, "I was wrong." She could already see, as if they had been written upon Casal's lips, the words he was about to utter. She had in anticipation a tremor through her whole person, and as a last effort she was trying to keep the conversation in that half frivolous worldly tone, which is a woman's best defence. "Yes, I was wrong, but, you see, I

was very upset. The conversation would have been painful to you, and—why disguise the fact ?—painful to me. Some things are very hard to utter, especially to a man who has not deserved them. But you know my mother, you have been introduced here. You know how out of the world she is, and you understand what the tiniest slanders become to her. I have no right to oppose her. You understand that too. Do not therefore feel any personal sorrow about it, for in six months or a year I shall receive you again, just as I have done, with great, very great esteem, and very real sympathy."

"All that is quite irrefutable," replied Raymond, bowing his head, "and once again I have accepted that sentence. Only this is what I want to add. In talking to me as you have just done, you have been addressing the official Casal, the gentleman who was introduced to you two months ago, who is on visiting terms with yourself, as with Madame de Candale, Madame d'Arcole and twenty others. Would you use exactly the same words, madam, if the man whom you are treating like an ordinary acquaintance came and said to you: 'Since I have known you, madam, my life has absolutely changed. It had no aim. Now it has one. I believed myself finished, my heart used up and incapable of a profound sentiment. I have experienced one. I accepted the way of growing old, like so many of my friends, of dividing my time between the club and the racecourse, without any other object than to kill day after day in what is known as pleasure. To-day I have in front of me the most serious, lofty and passionate of in-

terests. I assure you I should have postponed speaking to you like this for weeks and weeks, if this sharp crisis had not arrived. Between what I was the evening when I sat next you at Madame de Candale's table, and what I am now, there is a love such as I have never felt nor imagined, a love composed as much of respect and devotion as of passion. This is what I wanted you to know, to have the right to add this—when in six months you allow me to return, if I bring you after that separation the same heart full of the same love, and if I come to you and ask you to become my wife, will you be certain to say, No ? "

As soon as the young man began to speak, Madame de Tillières had expected him to say: " I love you ! "

As we have seen, she had prepared herself to receive his declaration by a little banter, though quite ready for a display of indignation if Raymond expressed himself in too violent terms. She had hoped to retain sufficient self-control to govern her feelings and not to let him see her distress. She did not suspect that he had at the command of his passion words of such caressing delicacy, nor that he could have conceived the idea of marriage, which was so strangely opposed to all that she knew of his character and his past. Such an offer, uttered in those terms by this man, constituted a stronger proof than all the protestations in favour of the sentiment which Madame de Tillières had inspired in him. Against a burning avowal which revealed a desire for her person, she would, certainly, have found strength for an immediate revolt which would have saved her,

Against reproaches and demands for explanation was she not armed with a weapon of gentle persiflage and her official position as a woman of society ? On the contrary an infinite gentleness had insinuated itself into her suffering heart as the words of the man she loved became so tender, and so like those she had not even dared to desire. She felt her determination melt into guilty weakness, which was suddenly crossed, with the rapidity of a flash of lightning illuminating a landscape, by the memory of Poyanne and the morning. She was wearing the same dress she had worn at Passy ! She realized, by means of the terror which gave her the double sensation of her actual emotion and her recent rendezvous, that she was lost if she did not raise an impenetrable barrier between herself and the man who possessed the power of moving her so. Why then did it not produce in her a movement of entire freedom ? Why did she not confess to Casal that she was not free ? How many misfortunes would she have spared herself and others ! But such confessions, which sometimes quite destroy a man's hope however enamoured he may be, in the sublimity of their loyal courage are rarely made by women except to those they care little about. From those whom they desire to discourage, but without losing their love, they prefer to conceal their faults at any cost. Exceptional as Juliette was on many sides of her nature, in this instance she obeyed the common law. Then women excel in the invention of those romantic thoughts which protect them by glorifying them ; and Juliette had the strength to reply—

"You see I have listened to you to the end,

though I had the right, and it was my duty, to stop you after your first few words. I will answer you very clearly. I swore under solemn circumstances that if I had the misfortune to become a widow I would never remarry. That oath I will keep.

Later she experienced remorse for this untruth which hinted at her late husband, for to whom could she have given such an oath and under what circumstances save to Roger de Tillières on his departure for the campaign of 1870? It was not like her customary delicacy to mingle such a memory in a conversation like this. But she had no choice of method: it was above all necessary for her not to put Casal upon the track of her liaison with Poyanne. That was the most fearful of all the dangers in this false position which she was occupying. At the moment she had no time for remorse, for she could see, as she was speaking, the face of the man, whose hopes she was shattering, change. He had come to the Rue Matignon with a certainty, which had increased every day for months, that he was loved. He had not doubted the pretext for the rupture conveyed to him by Madame de Candale, and he had himself spoken entirely in good faith in saying to Madame de Tillières what he had.

The whole of Juliette's conduct where he was concerned seemed dominated by these two facts: firstly, she was passionately interested in him; and secondly, she was fighting against her passion because of the distrust aroused in her by d'Avançon on the day following their meeting, which had probably been increased by slander. He had not supposed that she would have definitely replied

to his proposal, but he had expected a phrase, which in his state of exalted sentimentality, would have sufficed to help him to bear his absence and exile. "Come back in six months and I will speak to you." He had already found an occupation for the six months, and proposed to cross the ocean with Herbert Bohun. He was so certain of returning with the same love in his heart, the same words on his lips, and so sure that with her nature Juliette would not have changed! Because of a phenomenon frequently found in men who despise women when they allow themselves to be enslaved by the charms of one, he put Madame de Tillières far away from everything his experience had taught him, and he believed of her, by instinct, what he habitually denied the others. So he did not feel a second's doubt before the unexpected revelation of the mysterious and romantic engagement which demolished at a blow the castle of illusions built in his dreams.

How he would formerly have laughed at a friend who believed, without hesitation, a story of this simplicity of invention! But after all believing this story was no more extraordinary than his dream of marriage. He spoke the truth. The idea of marrying Madame de Tillières had been growing in his mind for many days. It was born of the conviction that this woman had never had, would never have and could not have a lover; then of the conviction that he, Raymond, had never and would never experience the same feelings towards any one that he did towards her. But in spite of the force of the sentiments he brought to Juliette, he retained from so many

intrigues that particular tact which teaches a man at what moment he ought to insist or appear to give way. He had the cleverness to see how troubled Madame de Tillières was, but also that it would quickly turn to revolt if he tried to struggle against her. If he disappeared, on the other hand, he made a return possible, and he had the chance of renewing the conversation on another basis, in case in her good-bye she let a word drop. It was not a very lucid calculation. He was, however, too upset to reason with precision. But men used to adventures, who have reflected a great deal about love, are like well drilled soldiers who perform their evolutions perfectly, even under the enemy's fire.

"Then, madam," he said as he got up, "there is nothing left for me to do but to wish you good-bye for ever. I know what I have to do."

She got up as well. Her nerves were so unstrung and her thoughts so disordered that in the young man's words she perceived a fatal resolution and involuntarily cried—

"What? you will not leave here without swearing to me."

"That I will not kill myself," Casal replied with a tinge of irony. "That was your idea. No, have no fear that you will have my death upon your conscience. I simply meant that I should have to resume my former life. It did not amuse me much before, it will do so still less now, but it will aid me to forget you. Allow me, however, one last bit of advice," he added, fixing her with his eyes which had become hard: "never play with a man's heart again, even if you have heard much ill of him. First of all it is not loyal, and

then you run the risk of meeting some one with a desire for vengeance when he discovers it. I can assure you that everybody is not like me, whatever your friends think of me."

"I?" she said, "I have played with you?" She repeated it in a lower voice: "I have played with you? Ah! you do not, you cannot believe it."

She approached him as she said these words. Seeing this movement, he took her hand, which she did not withdraw. The little hand he gently pressed was burning with fever. He drew Juliette to him without experiencing any resistance from her. Her strength had given out, and at the moment of separating from him for ever her courage betrayed her. He spoke to her now in a passionate and penetrating voice—

"Ah well! No," he dared to murmur, "you have not played with me; yes, you have been sincere from the first day I met you till to-day; no, you have not been, you are not a coquette. As you have not played with me, do you know what it means? Ah! let me tell you, proud though you are and wish to struggle against the evidence—it means that you guessed my sentiment, that it touched you, that you share it and love me. Do not answer me. You love me. I have felt it so often during these last few weeks, and even just now when I came in. At this I feel it again so keenly after my doubt. Forgive me and be silent. Let me repeat to you that we love each other. I understand to whom and when you swore never to marry again; but of what use against passion are childish promises, which a person has neither the

right to give nor exact, since no one has the right to swear they will not live, breathe, nor close their soul for ever to light, the sky and love ?"

These phrases, just like those uttered by other lovers in similar circumstances, which are only commonplace because they convey something immortally true, the instinctive leap towards happiness, Raymond uttered with his face quite close to Juliette's. He drew her closer to him and felt her head fall upon his shoulder. He leant forward to take a kiss. He was prevented by fear. She had closed her eyes and was as white as a corpse. Her overwhelming emotion had made her faint. He raised her in his arms, bore her to the long chair, and frightened at her pallor, searched for her salts. Five minutes passed for him in a state of terrible anxiety. At last she opened her eyes, passed her hands over her forehead, and seeing Casal upon his knees, memory returned to her with overwhelming force. The knowledge of the situation seized her with almost mad violence, and drawing away from him in terror:

"Go away," she said, "go away. You have given your word to obey me. Ah ! you are killing me."

He wished to speak, to take her hands again ; she repeated : "I have your promise, go away."

He had no time to reply before she pressed the electric bell on the table among the ornaments. At this gesture the young man had to rise. A servant entered.

"Excuse me, sir," Madame de Tillières said, "as I am in such pain and forced to leave you. François, after you have shown M. Casal out, send my maid to me. I feel very unwell."

CHAPTER IX

CASAL JEALOUS

A PERSON is often laughed at by men who pretend to have a knowledge of women when he points out that one day there will inevitably in their life come a time when their experience will be of no service to them. It does not prevent such sights as a Casal proposing marriage, with mad timidity, to a woman who for years has been another man's mistress. Perhaps we must recognize in this strange phenomenon one more proof in support of the thesis which assimilates love with suggestion. The hypnotizer puts a book in the hand of a sleeping subject. He says to him: "Smell this rose," and the subject puts the book up to his face upon which is depicted the enjoyment of a person who has just gathered a beautiful flower and is enjoying the scent. The woman we love tells the strangest and most romantic stories; and out of her beloved mouth we accept as true, almost religiously, stories which coming from any other source would make us shrug our shoulders. The analogy is all the more striking since that state of illusion is generally dissipated in a second, just like the hypnotic sleep. A breath upon the eyes and the sleeper is awake. An almost insignificant event touching the right spot, and the credulous lover has a reaction against his own confidence

with a force of scepticism proportionate to that confidence. Not for a minute during the scene when he at last decided to declare himself had Casal a doubt as to Madame de Tillières veracity. He had believed in the story of the mother's observations. He had believed in the mysterious oath never to remarry. Juliette might have made use of many other and less likely excuses to prevent any conflict between Poyanne and him, and the old lover of Madame de Corcieux, Madame Moraines, Christine Anroux and fifty others would not have had a shadow of suspicion. The magnetism emanating from the young woman dominated him to such an extent that neither in the afternoon after the scene, the following day, nor the day after, could he who was usually so firm and lucid hit upon a plan. He had returned from that visit with the double evidence that Juliette loved him and she did not wish to receive him again; and he did not think of using the first of these two certainties to struggle against a resolution to which he had bowed. So he loved for the first time, and the awakening would be all the more terrible.

Three days after, holding Juliette in a faint in his arms, without even planting on her pallid lips a kiss, the young man found himself upon the pavement of the Rue Matignon, and the time had been spent by him in the burning anxiety of contradictory desires, in writing letters and tearing them up, reasoning like this—

"If I try to force myself upon her, what will happen? Will she think me bad and that is all? There exists an implied code of gentlemanly be-

haviour which dominates in a certain social rank all the relations between man and woman. This code imposes its limitations on lovers who have obtained nothing and who, consequently, it would seem, have no claims like a lover who appears to have all rights. In this way the second, if he is badly treated, must be silent and take no revenge, while the first must, if he is refused, not trouble with his importunities the life of the woman who will not receive him. However unjust in regard to passion this conventional rule established for the woman's especial benefit may be, a man always submits to it when he values the esteem of the woman he loves; and whatever suffering this measure might have inflicted upon him, probably Casal would have continued for weeks suffering apart and without power to act, if a little fact had not intervened, which produced upon him a rapid impression like the breath capable of breaking the magnetic charm in the hypnotized. It was a very little fact, very simple and almost insignificant; but is there anything insignificant to a heart consumed with regret?

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon and Raymond, who had accepted an invitation to lunch with Mosé at the *Café Anglais* to meet a foreign prince passing through Paris, was returning home on foot. He had accepted the invitation to escape from his own thoughts, and he had made an excuse to return once more to those cursed thoughts. Lovers in distress are like that. The young man —O, the decadence of a leader of fashion turned into a sighing rejected lover—was walking along the pavement of the Rue de la Paix, to search with his

eyes the carriages and shops with the unavowed and childish hope of seeing the woman who was always in his thoughts. His heart beat more quickly. He recognized Juliette's carriage, coachman and footman. The carriage turned out of the Rue de Capucines. A block in the traffic allowed Casal to hasten and arrive upon the pavement in such a way that Madame de Tillières could not evade his salutation. Who knows? Perhaps the sight of him watching on the pavement would touch her, and to look at her for half a minute would be a great pleasure to him; and then through the narrow window, instead of Juliette's delicate profile, beautiful eyes of dark and tender blue, and her pale clear complexion he recognized the wrinkled face, the severe eyes and the white hair of Madame de Nançay, the suspicious mother who had closed the door of the little drawing-room of the Rue Matignon to him. The old lady recognized him too, and he was stupefied to see her reply to his salutation, which was now inevitable, by a most gracious inclination of the head, and a friendly smile from her grave eyes and serious mouth.

A Parisian is not mistaken in the eloquence of these trifles in which a young or old woman knows how to impress all her sympathy or antipathy, all her indifference or hatred. On the few occasions Casal had met Madame de Nançay he had pleased her exceedingly, either because she was sensible to the young man's discreet attention, or because an instinctive divination had made her realize the quality of the affection he had for Madame de Tillières, or else, from information she had obtained from Madame de Candale, in spite of d'Avançon's

diatribes, she looked upon him as a possible husband for her daughter. But to Raymond, after the story of her intervention, the obvious pleasantness of the salutation they exchanged was quite inexplicable. The contrast was too great between what Madame de Candale had said first of all, and then Juliette had repeated, for a man of his good sense not to be astonished.

"That is very strange," he thought; "why should she greet me with the amiability she did, after shutting the door against me? If it is hypocrisy, it is useless. I have not been the dupe of a phantasmagoria. She was there just now and looked more pleasant than a fortnight ago, when I saw her at Madame de Tillières' house for the last time. There is no sense in it."

He entered his club as this thought crossed his mind, and he unconsciously supplemented it with a shrug of the shoulders. He went straight up to the School of Arms, for in spite of his troubles he followed out his old system of continuous training, with his mind made up to overcome his soul by exhausting the animal in him by exercise. But it was all in vain that he furiously engaged in his favourite sport, and hit his opponents one after the other as hard as if they were rivals in Juliette's affections, for he could not escape from the reflections which followed his surprise, and when he left the club to return to the Rue de Lisbonne the following thoughts entered his mind—

"There is no disputing the evidence: Madame de Nançay has nothing against me, absolutely nothing. That is quite certain after her salutation. Besides, where was my sense in admitting that a

prudent mother, a woman of the world, would command her daughter not to receive a compromising man? Why such a change of custom would compromise a young woman more in the eyes of friends who came to the house and her servants! Then this story of the old lady must have been an excuse. Madame de Tillières thought of this means of dropping my acquaintance! That is not at all like her, she is so straightforward, simple and true. Unless?"

He hesitated for a few minutes before the new hypothesis which arose before him. It was very painful to him. It implied that Juliette had lied to him, and when a woman lies upon one point there is no reason why she should not on others. In the magnificent monograph on jealousy which Shakespeare has given us in Othello, this incomparable analyst has not neglected to mark the influence of analogy upon suspicion. The first drop of the virus is innoculated into the Moor's heart by this phrase from Brabantio: "She has deceived her father. She might deceive you." Iago insists: "She deceived her father when she married you." Every man who loves knows that the first feeling of distrust marks the passage of a frontier which it it is impossible to recross. Therefore a sort of animal instinct often urges him not to prove the first lie. He prefers to ignore it with the vague inexpressible feeling at the bottom of the heart that there is something to be found out. Casal possessed too virile a mind not to prefer the truth, however bitter it might be, to the pleasantest illusion, so he continued his reasoning—

"Unless? Ah well! why not? Unless she has

deceived me. Stronger men than I have been fooled by women who had neither her eyes, her smile, her voice, nor her ways. Besides, it is quite natural for her to have lied to me, since she wished to stop me calling upon her and I gave her no excuse. But why should she not receive me? Because of her oath? An oath sworn to her husband before his departure to the war? That story does not seem to have much sense in it either. When I began to court her, she quite understood it. I could only want two things with her, either to become her lover or marry her. Her lover? No, she did not believe that. She would have closed her door to me at once, when she decided not to be my mistress. Her actual conduct proves that in an irrefutable way. She must then have anticipated that I should have asked her to marry me, some day or the other. The oath already existed, if it does actually exist, and she let me go on. But does it exist, or is it a pretext like the story of her mother? Then what can there be at the root of this sudden rupture? Ha! ha! Monsieur Casal, have you been made to look like a ninny?"

This marked the reappearance on the scene of the old Casal, and the disappearance of the sentimental Raymond who for some weeks had worshipped at the shrine with the innocence of a love-sick cherub. The crisis of disenchantment was so hard, that he had that evening, in order to bear up, to overwhelm it with alcohol, and at midnight Lord Herbert and he were hardly capable of thinking or speaking, so freely had they imbibed. There was no better companion than Bohun for parties of this kind, as he was one of those taciturn drunkards who methodically

intoxicated themselves and yet remained as straight as soldiers on parade. Casal ran no risk of betraying secrets. At those times the Englishman neither listened nor replied. What was he gazing at with his blue eyes? How had he succeeded in systematizing his passion for whisky to the point of being able to reckon the nights throughout the whole winter when he had remained lucid? The only person he loved in the world was Casal—why not? Was it likely this taste for drunkenness and his friendship emanated from the same cause? Herbert had in his youth been the lover of a woman who deceived him with every one in Paris, but whom Casal had not desired, because of his companion. Did the latter know it? He had never explained himself. It is certain on the other hand that through the apparent stupor of his intoxication he retained enough lucidity to divine all that passed in the head of his only friend. For at the moment of parting he would grasp his hand in a peculiar way and say in the words of a poet of his own country: "She was false as water." This expression from his mouth represented a very bitter curse, when his opinion of the liquid is taken into account. He boasted that he only used it for his bath.

"Herbert is right," Casal thought next morning as he was galloping Téméraire along the most deserted rides in the Bois, beneath a grey sky which completed the torture of nerves already on edge from the alcohol of the previous evening. "The best of them are worth nothing at all. But for her to be a hypocrite? Yes, for she has most likely lied to me on two points. There is something behind this rupture. But what?"

He did not wish to reply to his own question, nor to say the word which was troubling his heart. He could see that only another man's influence could explain Juliette's sudden energy towards himself, and he could not bear the thought. This internal tempest resulted in first of all poor Téméraire being taken back to his stable weary and covered with foam, to the utter despair of his groom, and then Casal set out once more at two o'clock towards the Rue Matignon. Why? He knew beforehand that Madame de Tillières would have most probably definitely closed her door to him, but he felt an imperious need of assuring himself. He calculated also that there was one chance in a thousand that she had not dared to give the order. In that case he would see her, and this time tear from her an admission of the real motive which had so suddenly brought about this complete change in their relations. He recognized with an emotion mingled with the keenest anxiety, the corner of the street, the long garden wall on one side of it, and the front of the house. He went in without speaking to the porter, and walked straight to the little door with its glass screen. The force of desire was so strong in him, and we are always near believing in anything we ardently desire, that it was a disappointment when the footman answered him with an inscrutable face—

"Madame is not at home."

"I might have known," Casal thought, "and it was not very dignified to come and listen to that."

He was going away with this thought, and the sorrowful step of a man who had no aim in life,

when in scanning the street with the keen eye of a sportsman, he saw some one walking in the opposite direction on the other pavement, whom he did not at first recognize, but with whom he exchanged a hesitating salute.

"Good gracious," he suddenly remembered, "it is Henry de Poyanne. That is it. He is connected with Madame de Tillières. I remember hearing Madame de Candale or Juliette, I don't know which, say that he was returning shortly. Perhaps he is going to see her. I will see if he is admitted. If he is, I shall have no doubt that her door will be closed to me for the future."

He turned to watch the man, whom he did not yet suspect was a rival, and he saw that Poyanne, standing on the threshold of Madame de Tillières' house, had also turned to watch him. The two men remained motionless for a few seconds staring at one another. Then the Count opened the door and did not reappear.

"Come," thought Casal, "that is it. She receives him and not me. But why did he take such notice of me? In the days when we met at Pauline de Corcieux's we hardly spoke and he did not seem to notice my existence, while now. . . Has Madame de Tillières told him she has banished me? Upon what terms are they? He is the only one of her friends I have not met at her house. We have spoken of that fact. Under what circumstances?

He suddenly remembered, and with extreme exactness, a little scene which at the time had passed unnoticed, but this meeting at the door suddenly brought it back to his memory as clearly as if it

had happened on the previous evening. It took place at Madame de Candale's. Juliette was gay and laughing. The Countess happened to mention the name of the great monarchist orator, and Casal had begun to joke. With his habitual tact he had at once realized that he was on the wrong track, for the two friends had not taken up any of his remarks and Madame de Tillières had suddenly knit her brows. Then the conversation changed and the young woman only joined in a distracted way. Casal recalled this detail. What connexion could there be between this impression and his to-day's preoccupation ? He could not account for it, but the picture of this man standing at Juliette's door, following him, the discarded lover, with his eyes, recurred to him all the afternoon which he spent in tennis at the Tuileries. Meeting there the young Marquis de la Môle, a member of the same party as Count Henry, he asked—

"Do you know Poyanne, Norbert ?"

"Very well. Why ?"

"Because I must dine with him someday. What kind of a man is he ?"

"Talented, but——" and the young marquis made a gesture with his racquet like a barber shaving, "he flys at high game."

"But how is he with the ladies ?"

"One of the elect. You know that his wife left him and is living in Florence with one of the Bonnivets, I have heard. We don't know whether he has a mistress. But," he added with a laugh, "I thought once that Madame de Candale had a fancy for him. She was always at the House when he was speaking, with a friend who some-

times used to appear in her box at the Opéra, a blonde, rather pale with beautiful eyes. Don't you know whom I mean ?"

"Not at all," Raymond, who had recognized Madame de Tillières from this description, replied. "But," he added, "it was at Madame de Candale's that we were to dine. He was away and it was put off."

"He has been back four or five days," La Môle went on. "We are sitting on a commission together. He has returned from an unsuccessful campaign."

The end of the dialogue between the two artists in tennis was interrupted by Raymond making a number of bad strokes. He could clearly see a new track of grievous suspicions, and he felt that it would be impossible for him not to at once follow it up. There is produced, in every man in whom mistrust is aroused, a phenomenon of hyper-acuteness of the senses, analogous to the instinct of the savage in war, who never misses the rustle of a leaf, the breaking of a branch, a thread hanging from a bush, nor a stone displaced by a hurrying foot. Casal's meeting with Madame de Nançay had made him doubt Juliette's excuse. This doubt had led him to question the mysterious oath, and also to suspect the character of the woman whom for two months he had believed, till the glance he exchanged with Poyanne had drawn his attention to this mysterious friend of Madame de Tillières. To find out that the Count had no known mistress, that the speeches of the famous orator had been assiduously listened to by Juliette, and the fact that this person's return coincided

with his own exclusion, were these things not sufficient to provoke another fit of jealous imagination? His worldly experience, lulled for so long by the infatuation of his new love, rendered the crisis still more intense. He had lived too long not to know that in a woman everything is always possible, and yet Juliette was so dear to him that to conceive that she had a lover appeared almost monstrous, and he reasoned with himself on the evening of his talk at tennis, lying upon one of the lounges in his little drawing-room, poisoning him self with tobacco contrary to his usual habit, and incapable of bearing the society of even Herbert Bohun—

"Yes, there is a man behind this resolution. It is too clear, too absolute. As Juliette did not ask me simply to limit the frequency of my visits, some one must have intervened who said: Either me or that man. Could that person have been Poyanne? Warned by whom? By d'Avançon, that is obvious. But the animal looked at me the other day in a very curious fashion. Then Poyanne has great influence over her. But, by what right, if he is not her lover? She has no lover. No, she has not. Then she is a flirt of a kind I have not come across before. But perhaps she is a woman who would have been amused by having me, Casal, at her feet, because of all that had been said about me. She was free this Spring. So I filled the vacancy. The other, the real one, has returned. The old mother, the oath, and the vague phantom of the dead husband were all used upon me, I believed them all and their object was accomplished. Ah, well! No, she was sincere.

It was not easy to force her door in the first instance. On my first visit, her pallor, then her blushes, her manner at the Opéra, then at Madame de Candale's, then at home, all were so natural on her side, so little put on. Then her sorrow at the last? Suppose she is Poyanne's mistress and cannot leave him though she loves me? That is possible. Poyanne's mistress?" He repeated the words in a loud voice with infinite bitterness. In his fever of distrust he began to use his power to deface his mental picture of her. He constrained himself to picture her amid the details of a love rendezvous, and this vision excited his trouble into frenzy—

"It cannot go on like this," he concluded after hours of similar meditation. "I want to know and I will find out."

How many husbands and anxious and doubting lovers, suffering the agony of death, have pronounced the same phrase and attacked the same incomprehensible problem! To know, to have the proof, whatever it may be, the proof, which is to the jealous like water to the traveller across the desert, like a shelter to the homeless wanderer and dry land to the shipwrecked sailor. From a strange freak of passion the unfortunate who suspects has a supreme desire to know with certainty the fact, the simple imagination of which casts him into despair. At these times are committed the crimes which reveal the criminal undercurrents of every exasperated heart. Watching, opening letters, forcing locks, suspicion conceives and dares everything. Casal's first idea was to put a private detective on Madame de Tillières'

track. Then the young man experienced something like nausea at the idea of giving the name of the woman he loved so deeply amid all his distrust, to the infamous agents of jealousy's base deeds. He had in him that natural straightforwardness which comes to the surface in the tragic hours of life, and revolts at certain actions. After considering from every point the relations of Poyanne and Juliette, Raymond came to the conclusion that Madame de Candale knew the truth. She was also the only person with whom he had a clear field of action. But how was he to tear from this loyal friend a secret which she would preserve with still more energy than if it were her own ?

Here is the plan which he evolved after one of those fits of concentrated meditation, which end in the face of a complicated problem, by putting the finger upon the simple, and very often the correct, solution. Madame de Candale really loved Madame de Tillières. Admitting that a secret liaison did exist between her friend and Poyanne, she would ask herself with some anxiety what Raymond could suspect. Under those circumstances he was sure to confuse her if he went straight to her and said: "I know all." Then he would take advantage of her confusion to mention the name of some one whose relations with Juliette he was certain were innocent. The Countess would defend Madame de Tillières. That would be the time to mention Poyanne and to judge if her second defence was exactly identical with the first. Perfect command though she had of herself, there were many chances that the young

woman would be disconcerted and more indignantly repudiate the accusation which was true. The ingenuity of this plan appeared so infallible to Casal that he resolved to put it into execution that very day, and at two o'clock he entered the drawing room in the Rue de Tilsitt where with Madame de Candale and her friends he had spent hours in conversation all too short. This recollection pained him when he saw the familiar room and furniture, the bust of the old Marshal, and Gabrielle sitting in her favourite armchair though not alone. Alfred Mosé was there and a detail will show Raymond's moral derangement, for though he justly considered the grandson of the famous banker as one of the cleverest of men and one of the hardest to deceive, he could hardly conceal his impatience at finding a third party between himself and the Countess.

Fortunately Mosé possessed infinite tact, and he only stayed ten minutes after the arrival of the new visitor, just long enough not to appear to suspect that he was in the way. The effort Madame de Candale made to detain him however deceived him, for he believed it to be forced, instead of which the poor woman, frightened by Raymond's eyes, was really afraid to remain alone with the newcomer.

"Ah!" Alfred said to himself as he went down the staircase, "can there be anything between the Countess and Raymond?"

While this subtle observer, as skilful a diplomat in his own interests as d'Avançon was just the reverse, was running over in his own mind various observations which might lend colour to his hypothesis, Casal had already begun the attack

with that suddenness which he rightly judged to be the best means of surprising the secret the possession of which seemed likely to kill his love at one blow. For he had sworn, if he obtained proof of an intrigue between Poyanne and Juliette, to look upon the latter as dead to him. He would think of it with no more emotion than if it were a question of a little actress or a courtesan.

"Do you know," he said when the door had closed behind Mosé, after a moment's silence, "do you know, madam, that you and Madame de Tillières have not behaved very well in laughing at me in the way you have done?"

He had uttered this phrase in his most disinterested tones, like a man who had been the victim of a mystification, who had unmasked it, and was ready to return it to its owner. But he could not change the expression of his clear eyes, which were harder now than at his entrance, and it was with strange anxiety that Gabrielle replied—

"Explain yourself." She added: "But don't put on your air of banter. You know it is very much out of place when I and my friend are concerned."

At all risks the brave and proud little Countess was ready to become angry, so that she might cut short the interview if it turned in the direction she feared it would. Casal suspected something, that was evident, but what?

"No," Raymond replied, "you have not behaved well. What made you bring Madame de Nançay into the affair at all when it was so simple for your friend to tell me herself bravely: 'Sir, you are a gentleman, I rely upon your honour. I

am not free. You annoy me by visiting me, you upset my life. Don't come again!' "

"You are still talking in enigmas," said Madame de Candale knitting her brows and considering the work upon the table she had begun, "but perhaps that is better. You have neglected me for several days and returned to your old companions, and I am afraid that in coming here to-day you have mistaken the address."

"Ah well!" he replied in increasingly bitter tones, "since you want me to dot my i's, madam, I will go straight to the facts. I know all, do you understand? I know that Madame de Nançay had nothing to do with Madame de Tillières' resolution. It was a man who had her door closed upon me, because he had the right, and I know his name?"

If he had hoped to surprise some emotion upon the delicate face of the Countess, his attempt was a failure, for the little hands went on with the needlework. The mouth remained immovable with a curl of disgust. The eyes followed the work of the hands, and her attitude was the most natural in the world, that of a woman to whom a bore was telling an insignificant story. She simply shrugged her shoulders with that pretty gesture which signified that she did not deign to become angry at such a mad accusation. But faithful friend and prudent as Madame de Candale was, she was also a woman and curious, and she committed the fault of allowing Raymond to say more, in order that she might find out more. She had escaped the first of the snares he had determined to set. Allowing the young man to go on, was permitting him to set the second.

"Ah!" he insisted, "you do not answer me. You are right. Do you realize that it is a little hard to be sacrificed to the jealousy of some one? of a M. Felix Miraut, a painter who believes himself to be a leading light of the Renaissance because he dresses in velvet to copy three twigs of lilac and a rose."

He went on tracing one of those atrocious though somewhat accurate caricatures, which envy excels in sketching, from the visible traits of famous men. It suffices to put an evil interpretation upon a few of the trifling puerilities almost always inseparable from talent. Miraut's enemies in fact reproached him with the eccentricity of his costumes being affectation, and his taste for fashionable society with being a mark of commercial diplomacy. He wore those costumes because it amused him to do so, and he frequented drawing-rooms, because after seven o'clock when tired with work this refined artist loved to rest his eyes upon a pretty colour scheme. In exaggerating in this case his criticism of a man still young enough to please and intimately enough connected with Madame de Tillières to be suspected without too much improbability Casal reckoned upon thwarting his listener's cleverness, much more than by talking of Miraut, and he was thinking of the other, his real rival; so he found no difficulty in making his voice sarcastic and hard, and his face express suffering by which the Countess was duped; for suddenly reassured as to the track followed by Raymond's distrust, she began the smile indulgently at him as if he were an invalid—

"You are mad, my poor friend," she replied,

"mad enough to be under restraint. Miraut jealous of you? Miraut having influence over Madame de Tillières. See, I can't even get angry with you. Miraut? Why not d'Artelles? Why not Prosny? Why not d'Avançon? While you are about it you ought to distrust d'Avançon. I can assure you that the attentions of such a dangerous man are a fine subject for thought for a connoisseur in character as you are now proving yourself to be."

"Then if it is not Miraut," Casal said with an irony which suddenly made Madame de Candale knit her brows.

"If it is not Miraut?" she repeated.

"It is perhaps the friend who returned on the very day that I had the door shut in my face, M. de Poyanne, I believe."

"Listen, Casal," the young woman replied again, shrugging her shoulders, but this time without a smile, "I have always defended you when your character was attacked, I have always said that you were better than your reputation, which is detestable. Just now I did not want to take you seriously. But if you are serious, and really suspect in such an evil fashion the woman who is my great friend, whom you have met through me and here, and if you go about spreading broadcast your slanders as you have done here, it is an abominable action, do you understand? and one which I will not permit. Madame de Tillières has behaved to you with perfect loyalty. She received warnings about you which she did not heed out of respect for me. She has received you and has not flirted with you. Difficulties with her mother rendered your attentions painful, almost impossible.

She loyally warned you, and instead of obeying her, you slander her, and exercise your imagination in sullying the friendships which surround her. That is an indignity, do you hear ? an indignity."

" You are right, madam," Raymond said after a fresh silence, " and I beg your pardon. I will promise you," he added in an indistinct voice, " that I will never speak to you of Madame de Tillières again.

" And you will not think of her what you have just said ? " the Countess insisted.

" And I will not think it again," Casal said, and he had the strength to continue the conversation in a different strain and upon another subject ; but this time his object was not to deceive Gabrielle, and she did not seek to discover any more. She was already reproaching herself for not adopting the only really efficacious method of thwarting a jealous inquisition : silence. She felt, without understanding the depth of the ruse adopted by the young man, that she had said too much. So when Casal said good afternoon she remained for a very long time with her forehead resting upon her hand reproaching herself, and wondering whether or not she ought to warn Juliette. Danger threatened her friend. She felt it through the same instinct which made her now see in Raymond depths of passion she had never suspected before this visit—

" Yes," she concluded. " I will go to the Rue de Matignon at once and put her on her guard. After all, what can he do, but annoy her with a letter, or a scene ? But how did he discover the truth ? "

No, Casal had not actually discovered the cruel truth. His plan had succeeded, and Madame de Candale, in defending her friend in such an airy fashion from his accusation as regards Miraut, and in such a determined way as regards the other man, outlined the field of search where his wide-awake jealousy should operate. It was to Poyanne that it was necessary to look for the secret of Madame de Tillières' life. Very evidently the Countess had not attached equal importance to the two accusations. What reason was there for this if not that the second was near the truth and the other was not? When the young man was face to face with himself at the conclusion of his visit, he endured the crisis of suffering which in jealousy accompanies every step towards certainty. A new fact had been acquired, and Raymond at once interpreted it, as all tormented hearts do, in the sense of his worst thoughts. "There is no doubt about it," he said as he was going towards the Bois to subdue his anxiety by one of those furious walks which at such times, do not even tire the body, "there is no doubt about it, Poyanne is her lover." The frightful visions he had tried to dispel by hazarding his strange conduct with Madame de Candale returned to him, and this time he did not struggle against them. They haunted and obsessed him again in the evening when he was dining at the club with his friend Lord Herbert.

They did not leave him during the hours which followed and which he employed in first of all opposing his troubles by excess, and then in recapitulating the ideas from which they arose. Not possessing information which would have allowed

him to reconstruct Juliette's history for ten years, he did not realize in any way the drama which had been acted in her soul, the duel between love and pity, the struggle between the thirst for personal happiness and a desire for fidelity to her undertakings. This beautiful creature appeared to him like an enigma of duplicity, all the more monstrous because she had seemed so charming to him. While he was abandoning himself to her mercy, and had been foolish enough to judge her to be noble, proud, delicate and pure, she was amusing herself by beguiling with him the leisure the absence of a lover gave her!

"Yes, of a lover," he insisted, seeing as the days passed and forcing himself to see more significance in Madame de Candale's attitude. Then at certain times he was constrained to say to himself—

"No, there is no absolute proof yet. But no one ever has the chance of that."

Such was the disposition of mind in which the unhappy man found himself as he took his seat about a week after his visit to Madame de Candale, in his stall at the Théâtre Français. In spite of his mental disturbance, being of the race of those who never surrender, he multiplied opportunities for not remaining alone, and after spending the day in sporting occupations, he in the evening attended fashionable gatherings, as if he had not in his heart the open wound of a most terrible suspicion. Then in going to places like the Opéra and the Comédie, places he detested most of all in the old days at that period of the year, he sought—without admitting it to himself—the possibility of seeing Madame de Tillières again. He had not

met her once since, on waking from her fainting fit, she had sent him away. In vain he steeled himself not to listen to the voice which pleaded in his heart for the young woman. This voice, which defends our love against ourselves, awakens in us so tender an echo! In spite of himself, Casal saw in the seclusion which this constant absence supposed, a sign that her suffering at their last interview had not been assumed.

One of the inexplicable and invincible superstitions which lovers have prevented him believing that she had left Paris, although it was quite probable she had taken this wise step. No! It could not be all over between them without a fresh and decisive explanation, and that evening he was occupying a stall without listening to the play, and searching the boxes with his glasses, although he had already satisfied himself that Madame de Candale's box, where Madame de Tillières always had a seat, was most certainly empty. Suddenly three rows of stalls in front of him, his eyes fell upon the side face, turned in his direction, of some one who was looking at himself, and he recognized Henry de Poyanne. Just as in the Rue Matignon outside Juliette's house this exchange of glances did not last a second, and the Count at once seemed absorbed in following the dialogue and the acting, Raymond had no need to turn to look at his rival. All he had to do was to lean forward a little, and he could see the hair, blond in some parts and grey in others, of the famous orator, his thin face, his narrow shoulders, and his slender hand holding his opera glasses with a nervousness which revealed his pent-up emotion. At least Casal thought it did.

He himself was overwhelmed. There is in the presence of the rival whom we suspect of possessing or having possessed the woman we adore, a principle of repulsion which in some people goes as far as destruction and which in others arouses one of those cold rages in which a crime is of no consequence. Such meetings disturb in our amorous nature the fierce undercurrents of the male who will kill rather than share. The strangest actions burst forth from it, and later on they astonish us, just as if they had been conceived and executed by some one else. While he was contemplating with the avidity of jealousy the man sitting a few yards away from him, the object of his most painful dreams for hours and hours, a strange and singular idea suddenly took possession of Casal. He had the intuition that he had the proof he so eagerly desired at hand. This time he was going to complete with absolute evidence the probabilities, which, in spite of everything, were still doubtful, of his conversation with Madame de Candale. He was quite aware that Poyanne had fought like a hero during the war. He also knew of the duel at Besançon, when the Count had vanquished his wife's lover. He therefore had to deal with some one who was too brave to brook the least affront.

"Let me think," he said to himself. "If I approached him during the interval and without witnesses offered him one of those veiled insults which a man of his character cannot bear, then I should find out everything. If he is Madame de Tillières' lover, and if he is really the cause of her door being closed against me, he will desire at all costs that this woman's name shall be pro-

nounced neither between us, nor in connexion with us, and he will arrange to avoid a meeting. But if there is nothing between them, he will stop me at my first remark and then either I shall give him or he will give me a thrust! You can never tell. I shall be glad to fight now and the risk is worth running to obtain my proof. For if he avoids a meeting, the mere fact is really an unquestionable proof."

This mad project had no sooner entered his mind than its accomplishment became inevitable. At certain times—and Casal was at one of these periods—love seems to resuscitate in us the primitive savage, in whom to plan and act were one and the same thing, and a little of the impossible calm of the savage is in fact mixed in these lucid and instantaneous furies. If all Raymond's nerves were tense, ready for a fight to the death, not one of his friends, who shook him by the hand, noticed it when at the fall of the curtain he took up a position in the corridor to await the coming of Poyanne, and approached him in a most courteous way—

"Will you do me the honour, sir," he said to him, "of a few minutes' conversation? Here, if you please?" He pointed to an angle in the lobby out of the way of passers-by: "We shall be more private."

"I am listening, sir," the Count replied, obviously stupefied at this opening. He had the immediate sensation that his unexpected interviewer wished to talk to him of Juliette, then he said to himself: "It is impossible. First of all he knows nothing, and then in spite of everything he is too much of a

gentleman for that." But the other man, still in an undertone, went on in the same voice he would have used for a few words with an acquaintance about a club or drawing-room story—

"It is a very simple matter, sir, and I will not keep you long; I only wished to ask you if you had any particular reason for looking at me in the way you did just now several times with an insistence which I regret to say did not at all suit me."

"There must be a misunderstanding between us, sir," Poyanne replied. He had become very pale, and was making an obvious effort to preserve the most unconcerned politeness in the face of so strange a speech. "Five minutes ago I was not aware of your presence in the house."

"I am grieved to have to contradict you, sir," Raymond retorted. "You stared at me, I repeat, several times, and as it is not the first time such a thing has happened, I wish to have a clear conscience and warn you that I am prepared, at need, to prevent you looking at me in that way."

As he pronounced these words with such gratuitous and extraordinary insolence, he could see upon the Count's face signs of the struggle which was taking place in him between outraged pride and his absolute determination not to take offence. Poyanne at once realized, with the rapidity of thought which is aroused in us at such moments, this truth: "Casal knows that Madame de Tillières has sent him away because of me. Then he also knows my relations with her. A man capable of this inexcusable insult is also capable of mentioning her name if we fight. That must be

avoided at all costs." He had the chivalrous energy to again control himself and to answer—

"Once more, sir, I can assure you there is a mistake. I have never had any motive for looking at you in a way which could annoy you, and I have no intention whatever of beginning after a conversation which for that reason there is no necessity to prolong and which I beg of you to terminate."

"In fact," Casal said, "I see that I am not to talk any more to a coward." This insulting phrase issued from his lips in spite of himself. It was quite contrary to his plan of simple inquiry. But in finding the Count so troubled and at the same time so master of himself, so sensible and so deliberately disposed to avoid a quarrel, he had again, as in his conversation with Madame de Candale, a second's evidence. This second sufficed for the fury of jealousy to tear from him the irreparable word, after which a man of courage, whether he be a woman's lover or not, does not draw back. From being pale the Count's face had become purple.

"Sir," he said, "I answered you just now in the way I did because I believed you were in good faith making a mistake. I see that you are trying to force me into a quarrel and desire a meeting. You shall have it. I am ignorant of the motive which prompts you to concern yourself with a person who has never interfered with you. But I do not allow any one in the world to speak to me as you have just done, and I shall have the honour to send you two of my friends on one condition," he added imperiously, "which is, that

you obtain from your seconds, as I shall from mine, their word of honour that the affair shall remain an absolute secret."

"That is quite understood, sir," Casal said; and as if to prove to his opponent the sincerity of this promise he called Mosé, who was passing, and asked him—

"Here, Alfred, do you remember the exact date when Feuillet's play, l'Acrobate, I believe it was called, in which Bressant was so wonderful, was produced here? It was founded on the same subject as the clever Petite Marquise, but in romance. M. de. Poyanne and myself were discussing it. He says 1872, but I think it was 1873."

CHAPTER X

BEFORE THE DUEL

THE day following the scene at the Théâtre Français, that scene, which it was impossible to foresee and which suddenly introduced tragedy into the sentimental romance of Juliette, she was about two o'clock in the afternoon in the circular walk in her garden. The red cluster of acacias in blossom perfumed the air with their sweet scent which she breathed deeply as she walked along, wrapt in thought. She watched the foliage turn green under the influence of the summer sun, and the flight of a bird which settled upon the grass and then flew up into the branches time after time. Since her talk with Casal she had not ceased to suffer, and the crowning point in her agony had been when she was unable to entirely conceal from Poyanne the melancholy into which she seemed to sink deeper every day. But how was she to hoodwink this man's anxious penetration? He was so affectionate that it seemed easy; but at a certain degree of intensity tenderness becomes so morbidly susceptible that it is equivalent to distrust, and from the very first of their new meetings, had not Poyanne suspected his mistress of coming there for him, and not for herself, out of pity, and not out of love? Besides, is it possible

to imitate real love, that outburst of the whole being, that internal ravishment, which turns the presence of the beloved into the boundary of the world and time, the supreme sensation, beyond which we can conceive nothing, so well filled is our soul by it right up to the extreme limit of its capacity ? No, the comedy of these ecstasies of the heart is not possible to play. The voice of a woman will soften to pronounce still more sweet phrases than that voice. Her eyes will learn to be in keeping with her phrases. She will be thirsting to persuade her lover that she is happy in order that he may be happy. It is but a sterile lie ! If the lover loves her truly, he will soon have, through the grievous magic of divination, discerned beneath the tones of emotion an undercurrent of effort. Alas ! Can he complain of a lie which proves so much affection failing a still more passionate feeling ? Have we the right to reproach a person with not feeling as we should like them to feel, as they sometimes think they feel ? Then the lover is silent with regard to his strange anxiety, and relapses, as Henry de Poyanne did the day after the appointment at Passy, into that silent and mad scrutiny of the tiniest shadows, where a word, a gesture, or the distracted play of the features becomes the proofs in support of this terrible fixed idea : "I am pitied, I am not loved." In the Count this idea combined with another still more frightful which he tried in vain to dispel. A fresh talk to d'Avançon had told him that Casal was definitely excluded. The old diplomat was not mistaken.

"I have only to look at the face he pulls at the

club," he had said, rubbing his hands, "to be sure of it."

So Madame de Tillières had kept her promise and declined to receive the young man again. Even without any sort of confirmation and inquiry Henry was sure of it. His meeting with Raymond almost on the door step had also proved it to him. He had seen from the end of the street Casal enter and immediately come out again, and the imprudent glance which he had bestowed upon him had not been exempt from that masculine pride, of which the noblest of lovers sometimes feels the evil intoxication. But if after dismissing Casal Juliette did not regret him, why did she display all the symptoms of consumption, only explicable by the constant sufferings of a hidden sorrow? These signs are a very terrible thing for a devoted lover to witness, even when he knows the cause of the ravages which they reveal. To see the face of the being you love pale and apparently melting away, her eyelids drooping, her cheeks becoming hollow, her temples turning yellow, her lips becoming discoloured, and everywhere the proof that the flame of this beloved life trembling and flickering! Oh, God! if it should go out! What a shudder there is at the thought that the object of so much love is so fragile, that the whole of our heart is suspended upon the breath of a mortal creature! The punishment of this anxiety sometimes increases into such violent paroxysms that the person himself does not desire to love any longer. What must it become when the torture of seeing the woman one loves fade away hour after hour is increased by the thought?

"She is dying of grief for another."

That is the grand form of jealousy, and it is the only one known to noble souls which are attacked, not like positive commonplace minds are in actions, but in sentiments. It has as its origin, no longer the impure vision of caresses, but the certainty that the man does not suffice for the happiness of the woman he loves. It does not produce crises of violent resolutions and degrading inquiries like those which Casal was at this time conducting. But slowly and inevitably it exhausts the entire strength of the heart. It envelops a man in an unbreathable atmosphere from which he will emerge, if he does emerge from it, incapable of hope, without the power of joy, and with an exhausted heart. Many days had not elapsed between the morning when d'Avançon had gone to the Rue Matignon in his dangerous part of the willing slanderer, and the evening when at the Théâtre Français Raymond had accosted Poyanne, but this short time had sufficed for the latter to have fallen into a still more melancholy state of mind than before his journey to Besançon. He had arrived at this hypothesis, which, though a terrible one for him, he believed to be true.

"She loves Casal, without admitting it; and though she retains me as her lover, it is out of honour, perhaps out of charity."

When these ideas came into his mind, he experienced the feeling of revolt of the still amorous lover against the detestable charity of pity! Each morning he promised himself to have a definite explanation, but recoiled from it as soon as he saw his mistress' poor thin face. He trembled lest

such a talk should do her injury, and kept silent. But the look of his eyes, the wrinkle on his forehead, even his silence revealed clearly enough his relapse into the sadness of distrust, and the young woman on her side interpreted these signs of secret anxiety by her knowledge of the Count's character, and said to herself—

"He is not happy. I have ruined a sentiment very dear to him. What is the use? What good have I done in throwing back the other man into his life of dissipation?"

She was in fact sure that Casal was seeking forgetfulness in the resumption of his degrading debauchery. She could see him in imagination with a courtesan or another Madame de Corcieux. She felt that in her turn she was jealous. A woman who has not given herself to the man she loves sometimes experiences this, as painful as iniquitous, jealousy for those with whom the man forgets her. At these moments, and under the influence of her complex sufferings, Juliette realized, with fear which was never allayed, the truth of her moral position: she had in fact been able to simplify her life by loyally sacrificing her new lover for the sorrowing remains of her old love, by renouncing her happiness for the satisfaction of her most passionate pity. This attitude had not cured her stricken heart, the heart which beat, which bled at the same time for the two men, and she could not even make happy the one for whom she sacrificed the other! She was at this stage in her Calvary when the final blow overwhelmed her. Gabrielle came to tell her that Casal was upon the track of the truth. The shock was so great

that her energy betrayed her, that nervousness of delicate women which suffices for days and days of the most exhausting emotions; then they pay for this resistance by maladies before which science remains powerless, so greatly has the organism been ruined by the series of drains of strength upon it. She spent forty-eight hours in bed, almost as if dead, incapable of moving, thinking and feeling, in the presence of the fearful unknown as represented to her by this discovery. She was still overcome by this crisis a week later, on the bright summer afternoon when she was walking in the little garden, listening to the birds, looking at the flowers, but always obsessed by the question which now haunted her at every hour of the day and night—

"Does Raymond know of my liaison with Henry? What does he think, what will he do?"

What did he think? That she could guess very well, and she could also be sure that, being unable to understand the shades of feeling through which she had passed, he certainly despised her for acting as a flirt to him while she was another man's mistress. In the delirium of revolt which this idea of his contempt inflicted upon her, she went so far as to conceive the most dangerous plans, quite as foreign to her nature as to her principles: to write and tell him the whole story and make an appointment with him. Then she said to herself: "No, he will not believe me, and if I see him again I am lost." She understood that after her weakness in the course of their last interview, to be alone with him again was to place herself at his mercy. She no longer felt sure of

herself. In the eyes of this man which were once full of her worship she could imagine the outrage of a horrible certainty. What certainty? How had he obtained proof of her intrigue? This mystery above all other confounded her reason, and then she asked herself: "Yes, what will he do?"

A shudder of fear shook her, and it was in vain that she fought against it with arguments founded upon the delicacy of Casal's conduct to her. At that time he suspected nothing; and now? She was upon the brink of tragic conflicts, and she felt their terror in advance, while she continued her monotonous walk along the garden path, and the sun went on shining, the acacias shedding their perfumes, and the time passed, bringing near the second when she would so cruelly expiate the weakness of neither daring nor knowing how to understand herself. Her absorption as she walked was so great that she did not see Madame de Candale standing at the drawing-room door and watching her with singular emotion. Without a doubt the pretty woman was the bearer of very serious news, for she seemed to recoil from the moment of speaking to her friend, though at last she called her twice by name. Madame de Tillières, raising her head, saw Gabrielle, and was not in doubt for a moment as to the expression of the face so familiar to her.

"What is the matter?" she asked as soon as she reached the little drawing-room. Madame de Candale had taken her by the arm and led her from the garden into the room, for fear of the eyes of Madame de Nançay, who might be sitting at the first-floor window following with a tender

glance, as she often did, the movements of her beloved daughter.

"Something very serious," the visitor replied, in a choking voice, "so serious that I hardly know how to tell you. Take hold of my hands to see how I am trembling. Have you enough courage?"

"Yes," Juliette said, "but speak, speak."

"I am the person who is losing my self-control," the Countess went on. "I ought to calm you, and I am maddening you. Come, sit down. How pale you are! You shall judge for yourself whether I was right in coming to you at once. We were at nine o'clock this morning having tea, Louis and I, when a note came. 'It is from Casal,' Louis said; 'what can he want with me, for he is a man who never writes letters?' He opened it, and began to read. I watched his eyes as he did so. I saw a look of astonishment spread over his face. He replied: 'Say that I shall be at the Rue de Lisbonne in half an hour.' When we were alone, I asked as you did just now: 'What is the matter?' 'Nothing that will interest you, a presentation at the club.' He had, as he said that, his lying look, the one he assumes when telling me how he has spent the day when he has had a rendezvous with Madame Bernard. I have suffered too much from that look not to know it. I was on the point of writing to you this morning to let you know, but it seemed so trifling. When we lunched together I at once saw that Louis was still very preoccupied. Suddenly he asked me: 'Does Henry de Poyanne visit Madame de Tillières much?' 'Yes,' I replied; 'why do you ask?' 'For no reason in particular,' he replied, 'to

find out'; then he relapsed into silence. I have often told you: he can conceal nothing from me. I let him remain silent, quite sure that before luncheon was over he would let fall a fresh phrase which would put me on the track of the secret. For there certainly was a secret connected with the note of the morning. It did not fail. 'Has Casal,' he again asked me clumsily, 'seen Madame de Tillières often since they dined here together?' 'I know nothing at all about it,' I answered him. 'But will you explain why you are so interested to-day in the persons who do or do not visit Juliette?' 'I,' he said blushing, 'what an idea!' As he said those words, the servant asked whether he could receive Lord Herbert Bohun, the Englishman, Casal's *alter ego*, who for years has never even left his card. I have left them closeted in Louis' study. I took a cab and here I am."

"Quite right!" Juliette said. "It is strange, very strange. Suppose it is a duel? Perhaps your husband and the Englishman are Raymond's seconds against Henry? It is as clear as daylight. They are going to fight. Is that not what you thought? Answer me."

"Ah well! yes," the Countess said, "I did think so; but I beg of you not to get excited. We may be mistaken. It is so unlikely in itself. Think. Casal and Poyanne are not in the same set. They are not members of the same clubs, except the Jockey Club, where neither of them goes often, and you cannot imagine them quarrelling in public. There must have been an exchange of letters between them. It is very difficult. But I am

sure there is something going on! I believe and can feel it, but what? We must find out. From whom? Louis has faults, he is very imprudent, and clumsy beyond expression; but if he has given a promise of silence, he is a gentleman. I wish you would see Poyanne. That is why I came to see you so quickly."

"Thank you," Juliette said as she kissed her friend. "You are my salvation. I should not survive a duel between them. Ah! I will find out. Henry will be here at two o'clock. He has not written to alter the appointment. He will be here. O God! How feverish I am; but you are right. I must be strong."

In spite of this resolution, and although the sudden sentiment of a possible great danger had rendered the young woman, relatively speaking, calm, as happens at supreme moments to natures which have the courageous blood of a noble race, never since the day when she was waiting for the despatch giving the details of the first battle in which her husband was engaged had Juliette been a prey to such devouring anxiety. The fifteen minutes which elapsed between her friend's departure and the arrival of her lover appeared to her so long that she very nearly sent a servant to the Count's house, because the time of the appointment was past a little. She regretted allowing Gabrielle to go, though the latter had said with much good sense—

"It will be better for Poyanne not to find me here. In situations such as these the more persons there are in the secret, the more self-conceit comes into play. Write to me at once to relieve my mind."

"Ten minutes past two," Juliette said as she looked at the clock. "If he is not here by a quarter past he will not come, and how then am I to find out? But the bell has rung. The door is being opened and now the door of the great drawing-room. Ah! here he is."

It was Henry de Poyanne, and he excused himself because he had been unable to get away from a business engagement earlier. In reality he had just left his two seconds, his colleague de Sauree and Général de Jardes. The meeting was fixed for the following day upon conditions arranged by himself and likely to make the bravest man reflect: four shots were to be fired at twenty paces at the word of command with hair-trigger pistols. Pistols of that sort were in use at the time. The Count, therefore, must have been thinking that perhaps he was looking at his friend for the last time. His face, however, which Juliette at once scrutinized with eager eyes, did not display any signs of anxiety. In showing himself tranquil, almost indifferent, on the eve of a duel with a redoubtable adversary, the man was not playing a part. His tranquillity was sincere. After the unexpected scene of the prevous evening he had a strange feeling of appeasement. Incapable of imagining the real motive for Casal seeking such an outrageous quarrel with him, and one so contrary to the conduct of a gallant man, that delirium of mad curiosity—he had seen in it the effect of a delirium, but one of jealousy. It was the anger of a professional seducer used to easy conquests, who, when sent away by a woman, brutally laid the blame to the rival by whose influence he

believed himself to have been expelled. What did that anger prove, except that Raymond had not any hope left? Then Juliette had not taken too keen an interest in him. Although the Count had never had any doubt as to the moral fidelity of his mistress, it was an infinite pleasure to him to have what he considered to be an irrefutable proof of it, and he also felt a strange complacency in discovering that Casal was suffering almost to madness. Ah! this Casal, he had detested him so thoroughly for the last few days, that the thought of having him covered by his pistol gave him instinctive and invincible satisfaction. He forgot both that the secret of his relations with Madame de Tillières had been surprised, and that the chances of the fight were in Raymond's favour. When he went to the range that very morning to show that he had not forgotten how to handle the weapon he had chosen, he had seen fastened to the wall among the trophies a target with a perforated bull's-eye, bearing this inscription: "Seven shots by M. Casal." But why? He had braved the near approach of death in 1870, and besides danger would procure him, as well as his enemy, and for the same motives, after his long crisis of mental disturbance, an impression of particular happiness. Action, even tragic, appeases us when we have lived too much upon our own thoughts. It rests us, by its forced precision, from that intolerable incoherence which the abuse of contradictory reflexions produces.

Madame de Tillières was, therefore, during the first part of his visit, faced by a mask of serenity, which would have suited her had not her own

chief interests been at stake. It was not sufficient under such circumstances to stop at a hypothesis like this. She hungered and thirsted to know. She had one very certain way of making sure that Poyanne did not fight on the following day. It was sufficient for her to ask him to spend the day with her, and after a few phrases of commonplace politeness on the weather, and their health, she said, with a charming coquetry of voice and manner which she had not used to him lately—

"I hope you will be pleased with your friend. You reproached me with never going out, never getting any fresh air. Ah well! Mother and I are going to Fontainebleau to-morrow to see my cousin de Nançay, who went there the other week. Do you know whom we have chosen as our cavalier?"

"D'Avançon," said the Count with a smile.

"You are wrong," she replied jokingly. "You are our cavalier. Don't say no. I cannot accept an excuse."

"Unfortunately, it is quite impossible," he replied. "I have to attend a commission at two o'clock at the Palais Bourbon."

"You will sacrifice your commission for me," she said, "that is all. You know I don't ask very much of you. But this time I must insist. I have my reasons, too," she added.

"Admit," he went on with the idea of keeping the conversation in a tone of banter, and looking at her to see whether she suspected anything, "admit that I at least have the right to know these reasons?"

"I cannot give them to you," she replied, "but I

desire it, and even if it were only a caprice would you refuse to satisfy me? You know," she went on with a sad smile, "you must spoil me. I am not very strong, and perhaps you will not have me for very long."

"Seriously, no," he said gravely, "I cannot. Come, Juliette, be reasonable. If it is a caprice you would not like me to sacrifice a conscientious duty for it."

He had got up to escape the extremely piercing look his mistress had suddenly fastened upon him. Was she really suffering more? Then had she yielded, as she told him, to one of those fancies of despotism in which the nervous disorders of organisms are revealed? Or had she heard of the scene of the previous evening and its sequel? But how? From whom? She gave him no time to reflect upon this double hypothesis, for she got up as well, and walking straight towards him with her eyes fixed upon him, in a jerky voice said—

"Ah! Henry, how badly you lie! No, you cannot be free to-morrow. I knew it, and I also know the real reason, and I am going to tell you it and see if you dare to contradict me: to-morrow you are to fight. I also know who is your opponent. Must I mention his name?"

Although Poyanne's distrust had been aroused ever since the beginning of the conversation, he could not disguise, as she was speaking, astonishment, which in him was a confession. Besides, a cruel idea entered his mind making dissimulation impossible. If Juliette knew the truth it was not from his seconds that she had learned it, he was

sure. Therefore Casal's seconds must have spoken, but this was hardly likely; or else Casal himself. "Why not? He has wished to revenge himself upon her," he thought; "perhaps he even threatened her with this duel with me beforehand? He will have written to her all about it. What a wretch!" He did not stop to verify the chimerical in this idea. He did not consider that Juliette's ruse was simply proving a vague suspicion. The hatred against his rival was so strong that the thought of a fresh piece of villainy by this man lashed him into a fury, and he replied, with a steely gleam in his eyes, in a hard voice—

"Since you are so well informed, you know the cause of this meeting and that it is inevitable."

"It was quite true then!" she cried, taking him in her arms. The sudden certainty that the two men were about to fight had stricken her with a panic which did not allow of reflection, and she continued, trembling in every limb, and pressing Henry against her with all the strength fever gives: "No, this duel shall not take place. You shall not fight. You against him, no, no, no, I will not let you. Ah! if you love me, you will find a way of preventing this monstrous thing taking place. You two? One against the other? No, no, no, it is not possible; swear to me that it shall not take place. Do you hear? I will not have it. It would kill me. You two! You two!"

"You against him! You two!" The Count listened to her uttering these words and thus revealing the frightful duality of heart which he had suspected for days, and which she had taken so

much trouble to conceal from him. She had seen these two beings, who were both so dear to her, in the same flash of fear, and she had put into words her double vision in that paroxysm of mad terror which shows the depths of the soul. The unfortunate lover felt quiver in him at this evidence all the moral jealousies from which he had suffered so keenly. He freed himself from her embrace. He almost roughly repulsed the arms which entwined themselves around him and the hands which clung to his clothes, and he replied—

"We two? You see you do not know whether you are trembling for him or for me! You do not know which one you love! Or rather if," he went on in tones so bitter that they suddenly stopped Juliette and made her remain motionless beneath the shock of a fresh terror. Poyanne's words rang in her with the hard accent of truth. "If you know it, then perhaps he knows it too. I understand now the reason why, seeing only one obstacle between him and your heart, the last remnant of affection for me, he desired to suppress it by suppressing me. But as he has told you, contrary to the promise he gave me that we fight to-morrow, did he go so far as to tell you that he allowed himself to call me a coward! A coward, do you hear? and yet you ask me to bear that insult! Then would you like me to tell you everything? He has committed a deadly outrage upon me, and I will not let slip this opportunity of staking my life against his, for I hate this man! God! how I hate him!"

"Henry," she went on in a broken voice, as she took his hand, this time with the submissive

timidity of a child asking for forgiveness. "I beg of you believe me. I swear to you by the whole of our past, our happy past, that I have learned nothing except from Gabrielle and yourself. She came here just now. Her husband is a second in this terrible affair. He used to her two or three phrases which awakened her suspicions, and also mine when she repeated them to me. Then when I heard the admission from your own mouth I saw blood shed because of me! I cried out. But I love you alone. I am yours for life. We were going to be so happy. You came back to me, so good and so tender. Understand then, in admitting that this man loves me, if he has picked a quarrel with you, it is because he knows that I love you alone, and that I shall always love you."

"He has none the less insulted me," the Count interrupted, "and I can do nothing to efface that. No, I can no more draw back than if it were to-morrow and the word had been given to fire." I believe you," he added, as he replied to his mistress' pressure of the hand by a long and passionate clasp. He had again realized that she was sincere in her affection towards him, as soon as he suffered. He dared not tell her his real thoughts: "If I were sure you did not love him! But you love him, without desiring to do so, and you would like to love me." He began to feel so weary of this eternal uncertainty, and he had, too, such need of calmness to arrange his affairs that afternoon, which was perhaps to be his last. "Yes," he insisted, "I believe you. I understand that I have been imprudent in speaking to you in the

way I did. You know all now. I cannot withdraw what I have said. Be brave, friend, and do not say a word on the subject. Affairs of honour like this, you understand better than any one, are not subjects for discussion. Besides, I must leave you. I came to ask you to let me call at nine o'clock after dinner. I will wish you good-bye, if it is God's will. You will then have thought it over, and we will talk without using those phrases which cause both of us so much unnecessary pain. Even now we are not too happy!"

She allowed him to go without any reply. What could she do in the face of the evidence of this social necessity which was as implacably oppressing as physical necessity, as the fall of a house or an earthquake? Raymond had insulted Henry, and the latter was right: the duel was inevitable. But necessity does not imply resignation, and in her twice-wounded woman's heart all its powers of revolt shuddered against the acceptance of the atrocious torture which this meeting represented to her. Poyanne had been gone some time, and she was still there, in the same position as when the door had shut behind him, sitting or rather reclining on a lounge, her hands clasped upon her knees, her head leant forward, her eyes fixed, and there was in her head a whirl of pictures showing Henry and Raymond standing a few paces apart, the group of seconds, the signal, and the lowered pistol barrels—had not her lover mentioned that weapon? Then one of them fell to the ground. She could see Poyanne fall and the eyes of her friend of ten years, those eyes in which she could never bear to see a sorrowful look, turned to her,

and in their look of agony she could read this supreme reproach: "You have killed me." She drove away this nightmare of fatal omen with all the strength at her command, and another picture at once took its place: Casal mortally wounded, the Casal whose presence caused her a tremor of joy and fear, whose absence made her wither away through melancholy. His noble face, the masculine beauty of which had captivated her, appeared quite pale, and the eyes, also, looked towards her no longer with tender reproach, but with that intolerable expression of contempt, the idea of which alone had tortured her for several days. How was he to understand that there was room in her for this miserable ambiguity of sensation? Even at this time, the time of a tragic crisis, she did not know, she could not tell for which of the two she would shed the bitterest tears if the duel took place and had a fatal termination. But it should not take place. Must she go to the appointed place and throw herself at their feet in the presence of the seconds, she would do it. It was a mad idea! She knew neither the time nor the place of meeting, but only that in less than twenty-four hours the last scene of the drama brought about by her culpable weakness would be enacted. Her powerlessness she had realized when Poyanne had spoken to her with the firmness of a man who did not admit argument, and she had not found a word in reply. What should she do? What should she do? Turn to the seconds? It was their rôle to prevent those atrocious duels. But who were they? She knew the names of Candale and Lord Herbert.

When she approached these two what should she say to them. How should she entreat these friends of the man she had deceived ? For, to them if they knew her story through the confidences of their principal, she has a coquette, an infamous and perfidious coquette, who had, during her lover's absence, accepted the attentions of a man to whom she was prepared to shut her door as soon as her lover returned. How could she explain her absolute good faith, her involuntary concessions, and especially the abominable anomaly of her heart, which was so sincere and yet so double that she trembled equally for both of them before their common danger ? Then the nightmare recommenced. She could see a hole in a breast, a forehead wounded by a bullet, a flow of blood, and with this blood, whether that of Henry or of the other, her life was reduced to a state of inexpressible suffering, so painful that she desired to die at once.

The clock struck. Mechanically Juliette raised her head at the sound, which seemed to her in the absolute silence of the room to echo with an unusual solemnity and loudness. She looked at the clock and saw that it was four o'clock. Poyanne had been gone more than an hour, and she had remained there inactive, when Gabrielle was waiting for her and ready to support her in her work of conciliation. The idea, too, that she had in this way wasted, without using, so many precious moments, made her get up quickly. She passed her hand over her eyes, and her prostration of fear was suddenly succeeded by the feverish activity of movements of despair. In the twink-

ling of an eye she had rung for her maid, dressed, ordered a cab—to have her own carriage would have taken too long—and she was on her way to the Rue de Tilsitt. Twenty different schemes chased one another through her brain which seemed to be on fire, and the Countess was always concerned in them. They all, however, broke down before some contretemps which was quite easy to foresee. When she found her friend did not come, Madame de Candale, eaten up with impatience, had started for the Rue Matignon. Their carriages had without a doubt passed one another, for the porter insisted upon the quite recent departure of his mistress—

"The Comtesse was there ten minutes ago."

"Good gracious!" Madame de Tillières thought as she entered her carriage again, "I hope she has had the happy thought to wait for me at my house!"

That would have been the most logical thing to do. But in these crises in private life, which require precision and expediency the simplest schemes are the ones never considered. Instead of saying to herself: "Juliette has evidently gone to the Rue de Tilsitt and will soon be back," Madame de Candale, eaten up with anxiety, conceived the idea of going as far as the Rue Royale, resolved if her husband was at his club to call for him and find out something from him. While she was taking this journey, which was quite useless, considering the time and Candale's habits, Juliette arrived at the Rue Matignon. She discovered that her friend had called and gone away without leaving any message. In the face of this fresh misunderstanding she was seized with a sudden idea and

went back to the Rue de Tilsitt, where naturally she could not find her friend. Then in the disorder of her continual journeying to and fro, an idea began to grow in her mind and ended by enveloping this distressed soul to such an extent that it became quite impossible for her not to rush at this only chance of safety with that impetuous frenzy before which all obstacles and argument bowed down. What was the cause of this duel between Poyanne and Casal? An insult from the latter, the word "coward" hurled in his enemy's face. But if he could be persuaded to retract the word, and apologize for the insult, the affair would at once become impossible. If he could be persuaded? But by whom? Why not by her? If she were to go to him now, let him see her sorrow, and asked him to do all in his power to avoid the encounter? What honour prevented Poyanne from doing the other man could and ought to do, if he loved her? Without that, would he have gone to such an extreme? Yes, that was her salvation. Why did not she think of it before? She looked at the time again and she saw that her journeys between the Rue de Tilsitt and the Rue Matignon had wasted another forty minutes. The carriage was half-way home when she made this discovery which overwhelmed her. How little time remained for action, as it was five o'clock! At seven she dined with her mother, and at nine Poyanne was coming back. The excess of her anguish drove her mad, and as if in a dream she tapped the carriage window with her hand and gave the driver the address of the man upon whom at this moment her whole fate seemed to

depend. As in a dream she alighted outside the house in the Rue de Lisbonne, rang the bell, and asked for M. Casal, while the enormity of the step she had taken did not appear to her till she had entered the little drawing-room, the unfamiliar appearance of which recalled her to herself. In bewilderment she gazed at the walls of this room, which she was to see so often in her mind's eye, with its quiet coloured tapestry, glittering weapons, pictures and the elegant disorder of the furniture.

"Good God!" she said to herself aloud, "what have I done?"

It was already too late. Raymond was entering the room. He was in his study, engaged without doubt like Poyanne at the same time, in arranging his affairs, as is the usual practice before a really serious duel, when the footman announced the visit of a lady who would not send in her name. He guessed at once that Candale's indiscretion had revealed the facts to the Countess, and that she had come to him to obtain his permission for her husband to arrange the affair. So when he recognized Juliette, his surprise was so great that he remained for some seconds motionless upon the threshold of the room. Seeing that she was so pale and quivering with emotion she was unable to conceal, he realized that she knew the truth, and from whom had she learned it if not from Poyanne? He instinctively reasoned in the same way against his rival as the latter had done against him, and in the face of this fresh proof of intimacy between these two persons, he also felt an involuntary access of jealous fury. But he joined to it the violence of a man eaten up with

suspicion for days and days, who felt the need of wounding the woman, the object of his suspicions, of murdering her, of crushing her soul—

"You here, madam?" he said with brutal irony after the first start of surprise. "Ah! I understand. You are come to ask me for your lover's life."

"No," she replied in a broken voice. He had in fact by those few words wounded her to the quick; but since she had risked this mad step, at least she must try that it should not be in vain. "No, it is not his life I come to ask for; it is mine. It is not to add to the sorrow I have borne so long, that of knowing that two brave men, like you and him, are risking death because of my fault. You are the only one who can undo what you have done, and that is the reason I desired to see you, to speak to you, to supplicate you, if necessary, to spare me, as I can bear no more and would not survive a mishap."

She had spoken without sparing her words, in order not to commit the same mistake that she made in her talk with Poyanne, that of putting her two sorrows upon the same level. She could only see before her now the encounter, and her desire to touch Casal's heart at any cost. She did not reflect that her words were to this man a precise admission. If she had been calm, she would have first tried to find out what he knew concerning the relations of Poyanne and herself. But one of the characteristics of the hours of passionate crisis is this neglect of precautions, this absence of analysis of others. We admit spontaneously and invincibly that they think of us what

we think of ourselves, and we talk to them according to our conscience without taking into account those numerous shades of feeling which separate doubt from certainty. Now Casal, after his talk to Madame de Candale, even after the scene in the Théâtre Français, was still full of doubt. It was a question whether Juliette was Poyanne's mistress or not? He told himself that she was, but he was not sure. When a man is in love, it is thus. The most trifling indications serve as material for the most terrible suspicions, and the most convincing proofs, or what seemed in advance to be so, leave a last place for hope. While we are supposing everything evil it is possible to suppose a secret voice pleads in us murmuring: "Perhaps you are mistaken?" There is, therefore, when the evidence becomes quite unquestionable a fresh overthrow of the whole heart, as if there had never before been any suspicion. In Madame de Tillières' bewildered appeal Raymond saw the decisive proof that she was Poyanne's mistress. He had said to her in speaking of that man: "Your lover," and she had replied: "I have not come to beg for 'his' life." She therefore accepted the fact as something determinate, definite, as a starting point for the conversation, and this idea pierced his heart with the penetration of a red-hot iron as he walked towards her with his arms crossed, terrible in his anger.

"So," he said, "you admit it, he is your lover. Ah! in spite of everything I would not, I could not believe it. Your lover! He *is* your lover. No, have you not duped me enough? Have I not been

childish enough ? Have you not laughed sufficiently at the Casal who came to you with the look of a bashful lover, while you were another man's mistress ? I loved you as I have never loved. I dared not speak to you of my feelings. I must do you the justice to admit that you knew your business as a coquette very well, but you must learn that you cannot carry out that calling with impunity with men who have something there. I will kill your lover, do you understand ? I will kill him just as truly as you have lied to me for two months day by day and hour by hour. I understand that it must have very much amused you to say about me with your pride as a handsome woman, 'Poor fellow ! He is unhappy. What has he to complain about ? I promised him nothing, I gave him nothing. He loved me. Is it my fault ?' Yes, it is your fault, and as I can only attack you through this man, who has betrayed to you the secret of our meeting to save himself without a doubt; very well, I will strike you through him. Advise him not to miss to morrow. For I shall do my utmost not to miss him. Now, good-bye, madam ; we have nothing else to discuss."

This cruel speech, how strangely it contrasted with the respectful tones in which the most ordinary phrases had been uttered by the same voice since the night of the first dinner at the Candales. How soon had savage and invincible love drawn these two persons from wordly correctness, for him to talk to her like this in such bitter tones, and for her to listen to him ! For she did listen without interrupting, crushed by this contempt she had so feared, which she did not deserve in spite of

appearances, and against which the whole of her love protested. The bitterness of Casal's language maddened her, by brutalizing everything deep, morbidly sensitive and tender in her, and she replied, calling him for the first time aloud by the name she had used to herself for so long—

"No, Raymond, I cannot bear you to talk to me and judge me like this. Has no voice pleaded for me in your heart? How is it you have not had enough confidence in me to think that you do not know everything? You, who know life, how is it you did not say to yourself when you began to suspect me: 'This woman is the victim of a fatality of which I am not aware, but she is not a coquette? She had been, and is sincere with me. I have interested her, she has loved me.' Yes, Raymond, I have loved you, and love you still. But for that, would the thought of this encounter between you two have overwhelmed me to the extent of bringing me, Juliette de Tillières, here? Yes! it is quite true, when you came into my life I was not free and I ought not to have received you in the way I did. I believed that I was strong. I was weak. I did not see where I was going. It was all so rapid, so overpowering and so fatal! Then on the other hand did I know how much I was loved? I learned all at once my feelings for you and the suffering I was about to inflict upon a noble heart. You do not understand, being a man, that a person cannot go towards her own happiness across another person's agony. It is nevertheless true; I could not do it. When I felt suffer near me a man who had not changed; when I suffered the counterstroke of his agony

I faltered, and only found the strength in me to cure that suffering, or at least to prevent it! I am not lying to you, nor am I arguing, I am showing you the depths of my misery. It is to-day still the same. Look at me; see what the effort, the anguish of my separation from you has cost me! See my pallor, see what I have suffered and whether I have the right to say to you: 'Do not add to my martyrdom! Do not give me the remorse of thinking myself your assassin, or his!' Ah! no one can suffer as I suffer! No! It is too much! It is really too much!"

She was so beautiful as she told the story of the strange drama of which she was, as she said, the first, the fatal victim, beautiful with that sickly and submissive beauty, which touches the deepest strings of a man's heart! How profound an accent of truth marked this broken-hearted confidence of moral distress, the origin of which arose from too fine and tender feelings! Casal abandoned himself unconsciously to the charm emanating from her touching grace. He felt the magnetism of her sincerity. His first feeling of anger gave place to infinite sadness before, what she had so justly called, the depths of her misery. After in turn idolizing and cursing this woman, he saw her as she really was, illogical and so noble, delicate and so tormented, ideal and yet so weak, a victim of the storms of contrary sentiments and so punished! For what? For being unable either to renounce or accept. A feeling of shame enveloped him for his harshness, and he also felt his powerlessness to bear the sight, almost the contact with this wounded heart, without trying to staunch the

wound, and it was in tones like those he had used in the days before his suspicions—Oh God! how sweet was this dangerous change of tone to Juliette then!—that he answered her—

"Ah! why did you not speak sooner? Why, when I came to your house after my talk with Madame de Candale, did you not tell me the truth? I should have understood and forgiven it all. Instead now it is too late. You are asking me to arrange this affair? Alas! nothing depends upon me now. To make excuses upon the battle-field? Never, it is impossible!"

"Impossible!" she cried, wringing her hands, "impossible. And you say you love me! It is your pride which is speaking, Raymond, not your heart. I conjure you, if ever I have been good and kind to you, if you believe in me again, if you have really forgiven me, if you love me, listen to me and obey me."

She went on, drawing nearer to him as she spoke, assailing him with her prayers, with her eyes, with her whole being, breathing into him her will by that suggestion of extreme desire before which the most determined resistances weaken and yield, till he said to her in the tones of a man who is abdicating every possible part of his pride—

"You wish it. I can still do this, but do not demand anything further. Yes, I can write to M. de Poyanne a letter expressing my regret at allowing my words to run away with me to a man of his worth. I promise you to make this letter such that it may satisfy him. But if he is not content, if he demands satisfaction with

weapons, even after that, I owe it to him, I will give it to him."

"The letter," Juliette said hesitatingly, "when will he have it? at once?"

"Yes, at once," Casal replied after a short silence; "I will promise you."

"Ah!" she cried, "thank you, thank you. How good you are! How you love me!" Now it was her business to decide Poyanne, and once the letter was written by Raymond she did not doubt, she would not doubt that she could succeed in overcoming the Count's hatred, strong though it was, at their talk that evening. She had overcome, by her presence alone, the anger, jealousy, and the pride of the man who had first of all received her so cruelly. In the effusion of gratitude which overwhelmed her, and in the relaxation of her will which the success of her prayers brought about, tears came into her eyes and her strength failed. She held the young man's hands which she had clasped in her passionate thanks. He felt her tremble, and he was afraid that she was going to faint, as she had done on his last visit to her house. He supported her with one arm and she did not repulse him. He saw once more rest upon his shoulder the pale face, consumed with melancholy but with an almost childish smile of contentment lighting it up amid the tears, as if after so many struggles this dangerous unconstraint inundated the poor tortured heart with supreme and mortal comfort. He ventured to caress with his hand her emaciated cheek which she did not withdraw, to place his mouth upon her quivering lips, which made no defence against his kiss. Was

this in her nervous intoxication succeeding the too violent shocks of fear ? Was it in him that strange ardour, so sad and profound, which the certainty that another man has possessed the woman we love awakes in us ? Was it in both of them the obscure sensation of the tragedy of their lot, of the misery of life, which is attached by a mysterious and invincible tie to the troubles of pleasure ? Or was it simply, since they loved one another, the imperious, tyrannical madness of love which wills that, in spite of all the defences of reason, all the separations of destiny, all the resolution and pride, at a given movement, arms entwine, lips unite, and souls are mingled through the senses ? He dragged her, he carried her from the drawing-room where they had talked so sadly, and she did not struggle . When later, very much later, she left this house, which she had entered mad with anguish, she had entirely given herself to this man whom she had come to entreat to renounce his vengeance. She was Casal's mistress.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST TURN IN THE LABYRINTH

THE famous aphorism of the ancients upon the sadness which invades the being living after love is not only true in itself with a physiological and natural truth; there is also a social truth in it, if the expression may be used. So usually painful are the conditions that accompany the awakening of our thoughts which passion has intoxicated, the recovery of our person which we thought we had given but which we find we have only been able to lend. The man who comes and goes, with interests to look after, a part to play, and duties to perform must recover himself. The woman, too, must cease to be the mistress whose lover is her sole object of existence and become once again the woman of the world with her thousand duties, her house to direct, visits to return, a reputation to safeguard, and the countless cares of her daily existence. Happy still is she, who does not, on returning home, bring to a husband's confiding kiss or the innocent caresses of a child, a face still burning with the fever of forbidden pleasure! If only these frightful relapses from the ideal to the real could be accomplished by gradual stages? No. Very often an insignificant detail suffices, and a shock for a few seconds.

That was the case with Juliette, who after forgetting everything in the arms of Casal, had to realize at once the hard truth of her position by a brutally vulgar fact: she had left at the door the carriage which had brought her, and the driver, tired of waiting, had got down from the box. He was walking up and down beside his carriage, stamping upon the pavement with his heavy boots. When he recognized his fare he opened the door with a jolly grin, in which the young woman thought she could perceive the most insulting irony, and it was in a voice almost stifled with emotion that she gave a false address, any one haphazard, that of a perfumer's in the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré! She remembered that her footman had called this carriage for her. If the chaffing driver took the trouble to find out who she was? If he talked to her servants and told of her two hours, visit? What visit and to whom? At this thought alone the purple of confusion spread over her face, and the whole of her being congealed with a nameless fear. For the first time she looked straight in the face the new and irreparable thing which she would never have believed possible—she had a new lover, she, Juliette de Tillières! Under what circumstances had she given herself? On the eve of a duel provoked by her fault between the two persons who now possessed equal right over her! The exalted vibration of her nerves which still lasted was suddenly turned at this evidence into an almost mad shame. The carriage had already reached the shop. She got out without daring to look at the driver as she paid him. She dare not enter the shop. She dare not look at the passers-

by. It seem to her as if her criminal adventure was written upon her forehead, in her eyes, and in her smallest gestures. She walked forward a few steps, as if she were pursued by a spy charged with finding out whence she came and where she was going. She turned her back on the Rue Matignon. She did not notice it till she reached one of the broad avenues leading to the Arc de Triomphe. It was getting dark, and the first jets of gas were lighted. She looked at her watch and found that it was nearly half-past eight.

"Good gracious!" she thought, "mother has been waiting for me for more than an hour! How anxious she will be, and what shal lI tell her?"

Yes, what should she tell her? In a fresh flash of fear she could see the old lady who was used to looking right into her heart, thanks to the almost supernatural lucidity of extreme affection. How could she bear her glance? Her dread was so keen that she felt ready to faint. A sudden feeling of discouragement took possession of her, and made her sit down upon one of the deserted seats in the Avenue. At moments such as these souls like hers, overwhelmed by the most terrible mental suffering, conceive those startling suicidal resolutions, which remain inexplicable to their dearest friends, and involuntarily Juliette thought of death. She had only to call a passing carriage and drive to the nearest bridge. Her imagination depicted to her the green water of the river flowing deep and peaceful through the twilight. For the first time in her life this energetic woman, so determined to live and so accustomed to dominate her feelings, felt the attraction of the great repose,

which at the same place in the mournful twilight had very likely tempted more than one wretched creature—a famished beggar from the streets, a friendless girl or a jealous mistress. Physical or moral, every distress goes through this crisis of fatal temptation, all awaken in the heart an intense desire for nothingness, and before certain sufferings great lady and vagabond of the street are equal. But Juliette retained, through the derangement of her disordered sensibility, a too habitual idea of duty to sink like this without any souvenir for those to whom she was necessary. She saw herself, in one of her rapid hallucinations, actually dead, carried home, and her mother's despair. This picture made the presence of Madame de Nançay so real, that she said to herself: "I will not cause her this sorrow," and she got up quickly as she repeated—

"Ah! dear, dear mother! She must find out nothing. I will have the courage."

She ventured to hail a passing carriage, but not to drive to the Seine. She had resolved to return home bravely, with a determination to lie once more, to spare at least one person among those who loved her. All the others—Poyanne, Casal, Gabrielle, what suffering had she inflicted upon them! "To lie once more!" she said to herself. O God! how she had spread broadcast these lies since she had wandered into this labyrinth of sentimental complications! But what was now her remorse compared with the weight which formerly crushed her. The efforts to which she forced herself in the carriage to invent a little story, had at least one good result, during the short space of time

she succeeded in shaking off her nervous intoxication, which had as its first form the fever of love and as its last the frenzy of despair. She would now perhaps suffer more from the tragic entanglement in which she was involved but she would suffer from it as from a definite ill, about which one could reason, and no longer in that madness in which human nature loses its balance, even to the extent of losing the dignity of its suffering. This effort was not a very great one. The story she concocted to tell her mother, not to arouse the old lady's suspicions, was very simple but quite in accord with her pallor, tired eyes and obvious exhaustion—

"I was taken ill in the street," she said, "as I was walking home, for a little exercise, and I was helped into a chemist's. I would not let any one tell you, so as not to make you anxious, dear mother, and you have been even more anxious."

"Have the doctor at once," her mother replied, too frightened at the sight of her daughter in such a state of lassitude to be at all suspicious. "Poor child, your face is quite altered, and you thought of me again. How good you are!"

She kissed her tenderly as she uttered these words, without suspecting that even her excessive credulity made Juliette feel worse.

"I am better," the latter replied; "it will be time enough for the doctor to come in the morning if I have a bad night. I am going to try and rest."

"Yes, go and rest," her mother said. "I will see Gabrielle who has been here three times and will be back again about nine o'clock. Have you any message for her?"

"No, dear mother; explain to her that I have come home ill and have not been able to wait for her. I have no strength for anything."

This last gasp at least was quite true. Juliette had been capable of this last tension of energy to deceive her mother's eyes. But Gabrielle would talk to her of Casal, and especially Poyanne, who was also coming about nine, and her she could not see! To-morrow, when she had recovered her strength, she would once more be mistress of herself. For the moment she needed solitude although she knew too well the phantoms which would beset her sleepless night. But she was no longer in a state to calculate with sorrow. In the supreme crises of dramas of the mind, the passionate being resembles a soldier in battle. He does not feel the wounds, nor does he try to avoid them. Juliette wished at all costs to see clearly into her own heart. The act she had just committed had been so unpremeditated! This abandon of her person to Casal was so completely and absolutely unexpected that it needed hours and hours to admit that it had actually taken place, and to understand its reality; and as soon as she was lying in her bed with the lights out in the full possession of her thoughts once more, this was the idea she began to turn over and over in her mind—she was Raymond's mistress. That was true! with those same arms, which were now lying upon her breast in a gesture like that of a sick child, she had pressed him to her. With those same lips, which from time to time uttered this single plaint: "O God, have pity on me!" she had returned his kisses. They still burned her, insinuating into the depths of her

being a passionate ardour which her memory revived. What vertigo had precipitated this fault? What force of destiny had led her to the house, to the room, at that never-to-be-forgotten moment when she felt herself too weak to resist the man she had come to implore? The different scenes of the afternoon passed through her mind one after the other—her walk in the garden, Gabrielle's arrival, her talk to Henry, her carriage drives, and her sudden resolution to go to the Rue de Lisbonne. The frightful rapidity with which her downfall had been accomplished added to her shame, and she repeated aloud with a feeling of despair mingled with stupor which made her listen to her own voice as if it were some one else's—

"How I despise myself! How I despise myself!"

But to despise oneself, to write with remorse, to shed tears of agony, is to expiate but not to efface. The fact is there, and with it the immediate consequences. She would to-morrow be in Poyanne's presence. How should she act? Real nobility, she felt, directed her to tell him everything, to admit her fault and be prepared to undergo as well a deserved punishment, the outrage of a merciless abandonment. She represented to herself the details of this terrible confession, Henry's agonized face, his look while she was speaking to him, and she realized with inexpressible fear that the fact of having deceived such a noble lover had not killed in her the morbid sensibility concerning his sorrow. The idea that by this confession she would rend his soul so cruelly, made her reject it and say to herself—

"No, I will never admit that to him."

Ah well! Could she not part without that confession? For this time she must break with him, and to remain Poyanne's mistress, after being that of Casal, constituted a degree of degradation to which she would never descend. She would not have two lovers at the same time! Alas! had she not had them? Had she not yielded to the second before she had determined her position with the first? Both of them at this moment had the right to say to themselves: "I am Madame de Tillières' lover." To cleanse herself before her own conscience from the stain which she considered this thought implied, she repeated: "It was the story of the duel which maddened me. I lost my head. Without the danger of this encounter, I should never have seen Raymond again, never! Never! At least I have prevented them from fighting." Was she sure of it? Here suddenly a fresh panic seized her and completely crushed her. She argued, since Casal had given his promise, as if the letter of apology had been accepted by Poyanne. But would he accept it? He certainly would have done so if she had been able to see him at nine o'clock that night, as had been agreed, and envelop him with her influence. She had recoiled from the interview. Already her treachery was bearing fruit. If the duel took place now she would be doubly responsible. It would take place. As always happens at moments such as these, the anticipation of the worst suddenly forced itself upon her tortured imagination. She renewed all her anxiety of the afternoon, still further increased by the access of fear now that

this meeting weapon in hand would bring her two lovers face to face, and she continued to vibrate for both of them more strongly still. In thinking of one she felt herself in spite of everything invaded by the fever of the pleasure she had enjoyed in his arms, while the man she had deceived fastened her to his heart by roots which seemed more living through the fact of her attempt to tear them away. She had only injured them. She pitied him because of the outrage she had just inflicted upon him, and this pity increased with her remorse. Ah! what hateful, what criminal duality of soul! But where could she find the strength to triumph over it, when to-day after so many and sincere struggles to reduce her life to unity, she had turned into actions what had previously only been in her heart? Her most conscientious efforts had produced this monstrous result that now Casal possessed over her the same rights as Poyanne. How could she cure herself? How even could she understand herself? She repeated—

"It is not true, a woman cannot have two lovers any more than two amours. She loves one or the other."

It was in vain that she repeated to herself this formula of conscience, and fastened it in her mind with the rage of some one who felt herself carried away by a breath of guilty temptation to which she did not desire to abandon herself, for she still found herself a victim of the contradictory freaks of the two sentiments which exalted instead of destroying one another and also of the tragic vision of the danger which threatened her two friends. Towards morning, on waking from a feverish sleep of six

hours which terminated in a nightmare, she had a gleam of hope. A letter had come addressed to her the previous evening with a request that it should be handed to her at once. She recognized Casal's writing. It was with a trembling hand that she opened the envelope. Here are the lines it contained—

"TUESDAY EVENING.

"I have kept my word, my charming friend, and I have written to M de P. The letter, which cost me so much will prove to you how I wish to please you. This note tries to express my gratitude to you, and to ask you not to greatly regret what you have done for me. If, as I hope, matters are arranged, I will call upon you at two o'clock to tell you all that myself. If I were sure you would be like you were to-day I would ask you to come to the Rue de Lisbonne to listen to those and other things as well. But I realize that it would not be prudent. May I not hope that you will soon return, if not there, at least to a surer corner, where I can repeat how much I am your

"RAYMOND."

(*Copy*)

SIR,—

On the eve of a meeting like the one which ought to take place to-morrow, the step which I am hazarding would run the risk of strange interpretation if I had not proved my courage as you have done yours, and if I did not add that you might if you please take no notice of my note. If it suits you not to accept it, look upon it as if I had not written, that is all. But I shall have, myself, eased my

conscience of a feeling of remorse. Men of your talents and character are too scarce in our country and their existence too precious for me to feel the least shame in telling you that I regret the movement of passion to which I gave way the other evening. I repeat to you, sir, that in writing to you, I am obeying a conscientious scruple, and that, if you do not consider this apology sufficient, I remain at your disposal as arranged. Whatever you may decide, you will see in this the proof of my particular esteem..

CASAL.

"Henry cannot refuse an apology tendered like that," the young woman said to herself as she read and re-read the two letters upon the same sheet of paper; and this combination of the two made her realize for the first time in her acquaintance with Casal, something brutal, almost indelicate, about him. She would have liked him not to have mixed in this way, though it was natural enough, the expression of his sentiments and the memory of his rival. It was only a shade, but women who experience these shades of sentiment, do so always, and even in this violent crisis of her destiny, she found suffering in this confusion, and in the request for a fresh meeting which the final words of Raymond's letter expressed. She felt, beneath the apparent respect of the words, the rights of this man over her, the hand he had placed upon her will. He spoke to her as to a mistress with whom he was not very familiar, but upon whose complaisance he could absolutely rely. Would she have liked Casal to consider the

gift which she had made him of her person simply as an adventure? Did not the note at least testify that he believed himself engaged in a liaison with her? Why did the idea, instead of appearing to her as a proof of sincerity, suddenly wound her? Had she not on the other hand a proof of the submission of this man to her desires, in the copy of his letter to Poyanne, which must have, as he said, cost him very much?

She had a sensation of revolt against herself on realizing that she felt no gratitude for a step which would certainly prevent the duel. She went over one by one the terms in which the apology was couched, and she forced herself to realize their cleverness.

"Saved," she said, "they are saved! What matters it that I am lost?"

This hope was accompanied by a very painful remnant of anxiety, for she could not help making an excuse to send to the Rue Martignac about ten o'clock. She wished to be absolutely sure that the Count had not gone out. When she found on the contrary that he had gone out in the early morning without specifying the time of his return, her hope suddenly departed, and a feeling of anxiety took its place and grew stronger minute by minute. Vainly did she repeat: "I am mad, even if the affair is arranged he must see his seconds." She could not calm the excess of her anxiety. What could she do? Should she send to Casal as well? She thought about it for a long time. She even began several notes; then she dare not send them. She was preparing, in despair, to write to Gabrielle de Candale when the

door opened and admitted her. The anxious look on her friend's face scarcely left room for Juliette to doubt.

"Are they to fight?" she cried.

"I have found you at last," the Countess said without directly answering the question which without doubt she looked upon as a cry of fright, "and I understand that you spent the afternoon trying to convince Poyanne. I guessed you had not succeeded when I found in what a state you returned home. Yes, they are going to fight. I am sure of it now. I saw last evening upon Louis' table a case of pistols which had been brought under cover from Gastine's. This morning after he had gone out at eight o'clock the case was missing. I found out from the porter that he gave the coachman Casal's address. I waited for his return all the morning in the hope of finding out what had happened. But as he was not back by eleven, I could not remain any longer without news. But what do you know, tell me, what do you know?"

"I know that Raymond insulted Henry," Madame de Tillières said, "that is all, and that was the origin of the affair. Good God! to think that now perhaps one of them is dying, and I am the cause of it! Let us go, Gabrielle, come. There may be still time? Your porter told you where Louis' carriage was going. We shall do well to ask Casal's or Lord Herbert's. There must have been a starting point for them."

"That is madness," Madame de Candale replied. "First of all we shall be too late. Then I should not allow you to dishonour yourself by such a step,

which would only serve as your own destruction. Come, Juliette, be prouder and stronger."

"Ah! if it were only a question of my name and pride!" Madame de Tillières cried savagely. "It is a question of my not wishing them to die, do you understand?"

"Be quiet," the Countess said, "some one is opening the door."

The footman entered. The phrase he uttered, a very simple one, contained at this time for the two women such terrible significance that they gazed at one another in terror.

"The Count de Poyanne has called and wishes to know if you can receive him, madam."

"Show him in," Juliette said at last. "Go into my bedroom," she went on addressing Gabrielle. "I shall require your presence perhaps. Ah, how I tremble!"

She could hardly stand. If there had been a duel Poyanne had emerged from it safe and sound. But the other one? There had been an encounter. She realized it on her first glance at the Count, who was now standing before her looking very pale and wearing a dark coat well suited for eluding the bullets. She ran to meet him without considering what he would think of her way of receiving him.

"Ah well?" she said in a hardly audible voice.

"Ah well!" He simply replied, "we fought and here I am. But," he added in low tones, "my hand was unlucky."

She looked at him with eyes into which a gleam of madness appeared.

"Is he wounded?" she asked. "He is——"

She dared not conclude her sentence. The Count

had lowered his head as if to reply in the affirmative to the question she had asked. She uttered a cry. Her lips moved this time to murmur distractedly—

"Dead! He is dead!" She dropped into a chair as if overcome, placed her head in her hands and convulsive sobs began to shake her, so that it seemed as if her soul would pass from her in the groan which escaped her frail breast. Poyanne watched her for a few minutes sobbing in this cruel fashion. An expression of intense sadness contracted his face. He approached her and touching her shoulder with his hand—

"Do you again deny that you love him?" said he in the tone which Madame de Tillières had never been able to bear, the tone which betrayed his great distress of the soul. But at that moment was she even aware of his presence?

"Do not weep, Juliette," he went on, "and forgive me for the test I had to employ, to be sure of your real sentiments. No, he is not dead. He is wounded, though only slightly, with a bullet in the arm, which by this time the doctor will have extracted. He will live. But what matters it to me whether he lives or dies? Alive or dead, you love him, and you have ceased to love me. I desired to find that out, and also how deep your affection was for him. I have lied to you for the first and last time. I have been punished for it. Ah! it was a terrible punishment to see you weep like that. It is very bitter, but less so than the horrible doubt of the last few days! Don't answer me. I make no accusation against you. You perhaps did not know how much you really loved him. You know now, and so do I."

There was a period of silence between the two lovers. The first agony of despair which had overwhelmed Juliette, when she believed Casal was dead, had changed into a kind of stupor as Poyanne spoke, reassuring her as to the result of the duel, but also cornering her and fastening her to the inexorable and absolute truth. For the first time for months and months the position was clearly put before her, and the young woman was convinced of the love for Casal which she had always obstinately denied. Besides, had she not given a proof of it, when she collapsed overwhelmed with grief, at the Count's first words? She would not have found strength to lie to him, so exhausted was her energy, so weary and utterly worn out was she at the frightful ambiguity of heart with which she had struggled so long. She remained seated with lowered eyes, her hands clasped upon her knees, like a criminal awaiting punishment, and she was much more guilty than suspected the man who remained standing without the strength to continue the conversation. Some phrases, as soon as they are pronounced, have something so irreparable about them, that there seems, after they have been uttered, nothing to do but to go far away very quickly and without turning the head. If a person remains, however, the conversation is like the movements of a bull in the arena, which when mortally wounded and the sword still sticking in the wound, at each movement buries the deadly point deeper in itself. It was Juliette who spoke first in a pleading voice—

"It is true," she said. "I have been struggling for so long with a trouble I cannot overcome.

It is true, too, that you have the right to condemn me, since I have tried with all my might to hide from you this trouble and these struggles. But it is also true"—she became excited as she spoke —"that never, do you hear? never have you ceased to be dear to me, so dear that I could not bear to see you suffer for a single minute without feeling an irresistible desire to console and cure you! I have never understood happiness for myself without your happiness! I have never lied to you when I said that I needed your affection as I did air! Call by any name you please this sentiment which has bound me to you, which made it impossible for me to accept the parting when you offered it to me. But understand that it was and is very sincere, and that I have obeyed it without calculation! At least understand that, Henry. Do not think that I have played a comedy with you."

"No," he said interrupting, "you were afraid of my suffering. Ah well! look at it and look at me. I know the truth, I understand it all, and I am alive and shall continue to live. I am not at an age when a person cannot renounce happiness. But at my age, also, one hungers and thirsts for the truth, and the truth, Juliette, is that you do not love me, and love another. If I wished to have a decisive and absolute proof, it was to have the right to say to you without reproach without bitterness: You are free. Make what use of your liberty you please. Anything, do you hear? anything is preferable to that moral weakness which for so long has prevented you from courageously examining your heart, anything is better than

that pity which causes so much suffering, than those fluctuations between contrary sentiments which have brought you to what ? to offering me, the man you know, whose affection you respect, the most deadly affront."

"The most deadly affront ?" she repeated. What had he discovered with regard to her relations with Casal ? What was he about to say to her ? She tremblingly insisted : "Explain yourself."

"Read this letter," he replied, holding out a sheet of paper upon which her bewildered eyes recognized Raymond's writing and the note of which she had received a copy, "and answer me. I can understand everything and you must tell me. Yes or no, did you ask him to write this apology ? For he would never have done it of himself."

"Yes," she said with an effort. "Forgive me, Henry, I was mad. You had repulsed me harshly. That was my only hope, and a very feeble one, of preventing the duel."

"You did not reflect that if I accepted the apology this man would think that I was afraid and that I had urged you to take that step ?"

"No, Henry," she cried, "I swear to you that he did not think that for a moment. He knows you are so brave, and it was enough for him to glance at me to see that I had lost my reason and was a prey to the fever of despair."

"Ah !" the Count went on, "did he see you yesterday ?"

"Yes," she replied with a fresh effort.

"Here ?" Poyanne asked, though the question seemed a difficult one for him to formulate.

"No," she replied, this time with the resolution

of a woman who has had enough of all hypocrisy, and now prefers the ruin of her reputation to deceit.

"At his house?"

"Yes."

They looked at one another. She was as pale as a corpse. She could then see pass over this man's face such an expression of martyrdom that she again experienced that instinctive movement of passionate pity, which had so often paralysed in her the impulse of freedom. At this hour of supreme explanation she had felt, just as she had done the previous night, that the only possible redemption for her errors lay in entire and absolute confession. It was a feeling of nobleness and one which allowed her through expiation to recover her self-respect. But her friend of so many years was suffering too severely, and in supplicating tones—

"Do not judge me by appearances," she said.

"Juliette," Poyanne went on, seizing her hand; then bitterly in a tone which she had never heard him use: "Swear to me that this is not true," he continued, "that nothing passed between you and this man which you cannot tell me. I can sacrifice myself for your happiness, leave you to him if you love him. But not like this, not with this idea on the eve of the duel. No, it is not possible. Swear to me."

"Nothing has passed between us. I swear it," she said in a broken voice.

The Count passed his hand over his eyes as if to drive away a horrible vision, then gently and sadly he said—

"You see. That is what jealousy can do with a

heart which is better than that. Forgive me for that outrageous suspicion. It will be the last. I have no longer the right to talk to you like that. I have never had the right, for the reasons for which you have sometimes lied to me have always been so noble, and did not authorize that suspicion. I have had a few minutes' insanity. Forget it. I promise you that I shall know how to be your friend, and nothing more than a friend. I am too disturbed now. To-morrow," he added, "if you will allow me, I will call at two o'clock. We shall be able to talk, for we shall both be calmer. Come, good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said almost without looking at him. Everything crushed her—the lie she had just uttered, the feeling of her criminal treachery to this man who was so noble even in his jealousy, that he reproached himself for the most legitimate of suspicions as for a fault, the impression that this scene marked the date of a definite parting, and the eddy of the emotions which had so profoundly agitated her. She took the Count's hand in hers. The expression of martyrdom which just before had passed across his face appeared there once more, but this time it was so tender, and broken-hearted! His eyes displayed that sort of infinite and uncomplaining sadness which is aroused in us at times of supreme sacrifice, when we offer ourselves as a holocaust for our love. Juliette would often see him like this, and hear the choking voice in which he said good-bye before leaving! When a quarter of an hour later Madame de Candale, alarmed that she had not been called, ventured to open the door, she discovered her friend motionless

with her elbow upon the mantelpiece. She had got up to call Poyanne back, and then had said to herself: "What is the use?" and she had remained there without taking any account of time, of Gabrielle who was waiting for her, or of anything else except that she was overcome, broken and crushed by life.

"Has there been an accident?" the Countess asked, deceived by her attitude.

"No," Juliette replied; "the duel took place. Casal received a slight wound. In a few days he will be about again, I expect."

"You see everything has turned out better than we might have expected. Why are you so sad? What did Poyanne say?"

"Don't ask me," the other replied almost fiercely; "leave me, you have been my ruin. If you had not introduced me to this man, if you had not attracted him to your own house and also here; if you had not spoken of him as you did, would all this have happened?" Then seeing tears coming into the eyes of the poor Countess, she threw herself into her arms, displaying by this incoherence the moral disorder which at this moment made her sorrowful heart oscillate from one extreme of sentiment to the other. Gabrielle tried in vain to calm her with tender coaxing, without finding out the real cause of her condition. Her conversation with Henry de Poyanne must have moved her to an extraordinary extent, for it was quite distractedly that she answered her friend when she said: "I will send and inquire about Casal and let you know at once."

When, after solitude had restored to her her self-

possession, she gave herself up once more to the examination of her thoughts, it was no longer the image of Raymond which haunted her mind. She could see Poyanne standing before her, and asking her to swear that she had nothing with which to reproach herself. She could hear his voice saying good-bye. She felt the need of seeing him, speaking to him and explaining herself. Why? To lie to him again? To give him fresh evidence of her monstrous duplicity? No. All the words were spoken, all veils torn aside. Now he had found courage to utter the words which would bring about the parting, before which she had hesitated for days and days. Was she a prey to an infamous aberration, about to desire the recommencement of culpable ambiguities and grievous equivocations? What did she want with this lover, whose devotion almost extended to superhuman abdication. By what mystery of the heart, now that she had given herself to the other, and that her life could at last simplify her actions, did she experience this mad return towards that which had only been for months to her a chain of sorrow?

These questions arranged themselves and pressed around her during that afternoon and the night which followed, without her being able to fix her thoughts upon a single one, and she was more troubled than ever she had been when the time came for Poyanne to visit her. One o'clock. Half-past one. Two o'clock. He did not come. Fearing he had resolved to commit suicide, she entered her carriage and drove to the Rue Martignac. She was told that the Count had gone out and left no instructions as to his return. She returned

home. He had not arrived. She wrote a few lines to him. The servant brought back no answer. It was not till the following morning, after a night of terrible anxiety, that she received an envelope with Poyanne's writing upon it. She tore it open and read the following pages—a strange contradiction of this woman's heart!—with the same eagerness she had read forty-eight hours before the letter from Casal.

"*Five o'clock in the evening,* PASSY.

"I wished, dear friend, in order to write to you, what I feel to be due to you and myself too, to come to the rooms at Passy which in happier days we called 'our home.' I have never heard you pronounce those two simple words without my heart beginning to beat. They so tenderly summed up my only dream, my sacred hope for years, the chimera of living with you, always, in an acknowledged life, where you would bear my name, where I should have had you near me at all times, lavishing upon me the tenderness of a presence which, in itself alone, was the compensation for the sorrows of my past, the appeasement of all my sufferings, an infinity of happiness! But I am here alone in this refuge, which you will never again call 'our home,' looking at the mute objects each one of which is to me as living as a person: the tapestry on the wall with its landscape of trees and towers, the low bookcase with the books we used to read together, and the ancient vases I decked with flowers to receive you. Ah! the lover whom death has separated from his mistress and who kneels at her grave has not more melancholy in his

soul than I have now, when I, too, am upon a pilgrimage to a tomb, that of our joint past, nor has he more tenderness. I should like a little of it to escape for you from these pages which you will read when I shall be far away from Paris, far from our dear and mysterious nest. I should like you to retain of me, not the image of the man who spoke to you strangely yesterday, but that of the friend who thinks of you, as I am thinking of you at this moment, piously, tenderly, and with inexpressible gratitude for what you have given me of your heart, amid these witnesses of what was my share of joy on earth. You have made it such a gift that, even to-day and in the agony with which I am struggling, I can find nothing to say to you, as I think of those moments when you have allowed me to love you, when you have loved me, but thank you from the bottom of my heart.

"Understand me, my dear friend, I am not ungrateful to you, and in going away, as I shall do, I know, yes, I know that I am very dear to you as well, and that you have never lied to me when you said that you could not bear to see sorrow in my eyes. I know that when you read this letter and discover that I have left France for a very long time, if not for ever, you will experience real and profound regret. Shall you think me unjust if I add that precisely the depths of your affection for me permits me to gauge the other living sentiment in your heart of which I saw an outburst yesterday? You must have been possessed by this new love, for the knowledge of my sufferings not to have prevented its growth! The struggles which you have endured, I can understand

them now. The moral drama which has been acted in your soul, gives a light for mine eyes which permits me to realize at the same time the extent of your devotion to me, and how little that devotion is like love. You yourself have acted in such good faith in not wishing to admit it contrary to your conscience! You are proud, you did not wish to change. You are good, you did not wish to make me unhappy. You are loyal, you did not wish for a second to admit the possibility of treachery towards the man whom you looked upon as bound to you for life. Alas! Juliette, do not be mistaken, there is, in a heart like yours, a very strong sentiment which such reasons do not paralyse. Without listening to your cry of horror and seeing your tears yesterday when you believed in the fatal result of the duel I, who know you, should have learned enough from simple evidence. But I saw the tears and heard the cry. I am going away because I felt before the expression of your new love, that I could not bear to see this sentiment face to face. Whether you struggled against it or yielded to it, I should now be able to guess from your sadness and your joy, in your consideration for me and in your silence, and I am only a man, one who loves you with all his heart, and from whom you could not, should not demand supernatural energy. Besides, have I the choice to-day, now that I know the truth, of putting my sorrow between you and a new life, a love you no longer share between your conscience and what might be your happiness? Have I the right to give you the spectacle of a jealousy which I feel, I confess

it with much humility, incapable of overcoming. Have I the right to inflict upon you this consequence of my wounded sensibility which you have endured for weeks, for months, for years perhaps? No, Juliette, I realize too clearly, in traversing in my mind the paths we have followed, how an invincible necessity wills that two persons who have loved cease to see one another when one of them has ceased to love and the other has not. It is frightful. It is bitter. Ah! as bitter as death. But it is the price of self-respect, and that price must be paid, when it would be out of respect for a past that it could be kept intact only on condition that it was really, definitely and resolutely the past.

"I have thought well of all these things; some of them already when on my return from Besançon I suspected that you were interested in some one besides myself, but never so sadly as I did yesterday and last night. I saw in the sorrows we have gone through the expiation of our illicit happiness. I know too well the sincerity of your religious sentiments, not to see behind much of the melancholy for which you did not explain to me the reason, this regret, this remorse for a position into which your affection for me had placed you. For I was the guilty one, I who, not being free, ought to have always hidden from you a love, the joy of which was forbidden me. But who knows? If I had found the courage to love you thus, in the shade and silence of a fervent passion mortified and pure as a religion, perhaps He who sees all would have recompensed me for my heroic effort by preventing the springs of tenderness for me from drying up in your heart?

Who knows whether there is not for certain loves, composed of renunciation and virtue, a mysterious grace like that of profound faith which permits us to be always able to pray? If it is so and there is upon us two that fatality of expiation, my prayers to this God in whom we have always both had so much trust, even in trangressing his laws, is that his justice may fall upon me alone. It is that your new friend, the man who has carried away your heart from me, may become worthy of you, that he may realize what a being of nobleness and beauty has come to him through so many trials. I am here touching upon a point which is very sensitive to me and should be so to you! Let me tell you, however, that a change has taken place in me since yesterday. I have spoken to you very bitterly and harshly of this man against whom a strange double sight had warned me, as the executioner of my happiness. I cannot think I have been quite right, nor that a person capable of interesting you to the extent of love can be what I thought him to be. I wished, I must say, that I had judged him differently after his note of apology, so difficult for a man of his nature to write, proved to me that he was devoted to you, after all, in quite a different way to what I thought. I did not tell you yesterday something I must add to be absolutely just, that during the encounter, he was logical with his letter and fired into the air. May this, that I have just written of him be another expiation, this time for the passionate hatred which made me decline his apology and desire his death. May it be also my right to implore you to reflect before going further

along the path you are following. Try and study the sentiment which he has for you, now that you have the right to give way to your own. He is free, he is young, he is not the slave of a past. He can devote his whole life to you and be transformed under your noble influence. If it should turn out thus, I do not say that I shall not suffer, when I learn that you have reconstructed your destiny in this way. But understand that I love you to-day with a disinterested affection which has been so purified by the martyrdom of the last few days that I shall still be able to accept from afar the idea with that sort of peace of which the Holy Book speaks: "I give you peace, I give you My peace, not as the world gives it,"—the peace of a soul which loves for ever and for ever has renounced its love!

"Good-bye, friend, good-bye, star of my heaven, cloudless spot in a lowering sky. Good-bye, friend, who made me live when my strength was exhausted, and thanks to whom I can now say: I have known happiness. Fear not desperate resolutions from a man who leaves you, with his soul full of you, so that you may be happy and that he may not cost you one more tear. In my sorrowful meditations of the night I have seen before me the remnant of my existence and decided upon its employment. I recognized in my last political ventures a warning that I must renounce that sphere as well, and the renunciation has not been painful to me. Another field has opened before me, in which I have resolved to use what remains of my vigour. Our private griefs would be cruelly useless if they did not lead

us to seek oblivion of our own destiny in an impersonal task, in the disinterested devotion to our ideas. You have known mine too well in our hours of happiness, when you permitted me to think aloud in your presence, for me to need to tell you more, except that I have determined to go to the United States to work upon the great book of social philosophy, the scheme of which interested you, and the execution necessitates study impossible elsewhere and likely to last years. To-morrow, when you hold this letter in your hands, I shall be on the sea, having as my only horizon the enormous masses of waves, rolling in ever increasing numbers between us. My letter of resignation to the President of the House is written.

"My principal business matters I had already arranged before the duel. Our noble friend Ludovic Accragne, whose divine charity you know, has consented to take charge of a few matters which would have delayed me. Your name was the first which came from his lips when I told him of my resolution. I said, so do not make me out untruthful, that I had spoken to you of my departure and that you approved of it. Now I am going to think of you with sadness and inexpressible gentleness. You will write to me, will you not ? but not at once. Let me choose the moment when I can hear all the news of you without agony. You will preserve my place in your friendship though at present I should not be satisfied with that. My heart is so stricken, so easily wounded ! But absence will cure that as well, and it will only leave in existence the immortal essence of a

sentiment which is summed up in these simple words: Be happy, even without me. Good-bye once more, dear friend; remember that I have loved you. What can I say more but the old touching phrase of the humble, and that I say from the bottom of my heart: God keep you, my only love!

"HENRY."

There is produced at the time of irrevocable separation a strange phenomenon, with some likeness in affairs of the soul to the effect of retirement on the eyes. A humorist has strangely but finely qualified as posthumous crystallization, this strange displacement of the point of view of which Madame de Tillières was the victim after she finished reading Poyanne's letter. She placed upon her knees the sheets upon which her friend of so many years had left the impress of his heart, and her tears began to flow sadly, softly and continuously. He was there in his entirety, with the absolute straightforwardness of thoughts which even in the hour of separation, not an evil suspicion touched, with the almost religious ardour of a passion which made him find a martyr's pleasure in the sufferings of renunciation, with his faith in his ideas so profound that he recalled his great scheme for a history of socialism in his letter of farewell to his beloved mistress. The many and changing scenes which had marked the stages of their joint romance evoked pictures in Juliette's mind as well. She could see Henry de Poyanne as he was at their first meeting. She had then decided that he was a man of another century, as

his character had remained intact and disobedient to the compromises of that century. How delicate he had been in his courtship of her, and with what pleasure she had felt him begin again his life near her, and little by little cure himself of his first wound, and with what pride too! For at that time he had tried hard to distinguish himself, and his best speeches dated from the period, from those happy past years to which the letter alluded. That was the time when she concluded with him the secret contract of a union to which he had remained faithful but she had not. Ah! the tears which fell from her eyes upon his letter and smeared it were not only tears of sadness before the beauty of a poem of sentiment ended for ever. Remorse mingled its bitter regret in them. Yes, this noble soul was right, even more so than he had said and known. The parting was necessary with an invincible necessity. The woman upon whom he had lavished so much esteem, in giving him his liberty, what had she become? What had she done? But if she had desired now to prevent his departure, to protest against his farewell, to refuse the liberty he had offered her, she could not do so after the fault which at this moment she no longer realized, so great was the influence of this supreme message over her, conquering her as as it did, by returning to her her impressions of the past, her vision of the Poyanne of long ago, and absorbing and effacing all her sentiments of the last few weeks.

This recovery by means of the past, of which she had in her hands the fragile and sorrowful relic, did not last long. It was, however, so powerful that

during the whole of the day she had no thought save for the absent, for the man who had gone so far away though he loved her so dearly. She was awakened from her dreams towards the evening by the arrival of Gabrielle who brought news of the wounded, and then she reproached herself for so strangely forgetting him, for he, too, was suffering on her behalf. The promises of silence as to the duel had been strictly observed, and Candale had told his wife of Raymond's illness, representing it to be a slight attack of rheumatism in the right arm.

"He will get over it in five or six days," the Countess said. "Provided, of course, they do not make up their minds for another duel?"

"They will not," Juliette replied; "read this letter." She offered Madame de Candale the sheets on which the traces of tears were still visible, at the same time obeying that dangerous and irresistible desire for a confidant which we experience in extreme joy and sorrow, and also another and more generous sentiment, that of making her friend appreciate the magnanimity of the man she had so misjudged. She could see the young Countess' eyes fill with tears, as she read and she heard her say—

"Oh God! if I had known him!" Then returning the letter after a second's hesitation she said: "But have you thought of finding out exactly what Casal knows and how?"

"He knows the truth," Juliette replied, "I told him all."

"You?" asked the Countess. She saw that Madame de Tillières was so troubled that she dare

not insist upon the details of this confidence. Juliette and Raymond had therefore seen each other since the latter had come to the Rue de Tilsitt. They must have had a very confidential explanation to have included a confession of this sort. No more than Poyanne did she suspect the terrible truth. But she perceived the perilous novelty of the relations which such a revelation would create between the young man and her friend and she continued: "Suppose he seeks to see you when he hears of the rupture? For he will find it out. The newspapers will speak of the departure of the first orator of the day, and his journey to the United States."

"If he tries to see me again," Madame de Tillières replied, "I shall be able to show him that I am——"

This enigmatic reply, upon which Madame de Candale made no comment, for she was afraid to probe the gaping wounds of the stricken heart, did not convey any very clear impression to her. Juliette had by these words expressed a resolution of going no further in her downfall, a very late resolution. From the moment she left Casal's arms to the time her friend spoke to her like this, her thoughts had prevented her from looking her new position straight in the face. Her first idea had been to see her mother again, then the anguish of the duel, her talk with Poyanne, and her mad expectancy of its result, intervened. In their turn each of these events appeared to her as the worst of dangers, and yet they had passed over her like those great waves which engulf everything, and depart without destroying anything. She had

seen her mother. The duel had taken place. The Count, by his energetic action, had regulated their relations in a way which she accepted as conclusive. The most insoluble problems were solved all except the last and most terrible one. She found herself alone and free before an unknown whom Gabrielle's words brought into her mind: What did she think of Raymond? What would this man, upon whom now all the future of her sentimental life was centred, wish? What did he think? What did he desire?

When the Countess was gone she went to look in the drawer of her desk, upon which she had leaned so often to write to her first lover, for the note she had received from her second love on the morning of the duel. She re-read it with infinite sadness, for it created a comparison which at that hour was a very bitter one. The difference was too great between the message of the day following the fault and the farewell letter she had just received. Those few lines from Raymond with the clear allusion to what had taken place, with the words "charming friend," at the beginning of the letter, and at the end the distinct reference to an organization of their future meetings did not allow the young woman to misunderstand it, any more than if Casal had addressed her with familiarity and sent her kisses. She was to him a mistress, just as Madame de Corcieux, Madame de Hacqueville, and Madame Ethorel had been. These names which Madame de Candale had chanced to mention to her on her fatal visit after the carriage accident came back to her memory all together. He must have written in the same tone and with

similar sentiment to them. Why should he judge her with more indulgence than he had done the others ? Because they were gay women, and she was not. What did he know about her ? She had had a lover before him. Of that he was sure —would he not have been justified in believing that this lover was not the only one, simply from the way and circumstances under which she had given herself to him !

Something like a burning gush of shame inundated her at this recollection. What a contrast there was between his manner of interpreting her conduct and the image the other man formed of her, between this brutal desire, and the cult, the piety in which Poyanne enveloped her to such an extent that he suffered because he had not esteemed his rival more ! Good God ! What would he say when he learned of the liaison Casal proposed to her ? She could see beforehand with terrible preciseness the details of this liaison and she experienced all its bitterness. She could see the renewal of the clandestine meetings in Paris which had been the secret punishment of her relations with Poyanne, her arrival at a door, where her heart began to beat fiercely, and her departure veiled and trembling to return to the Rue Matignon. She had to support her, in the days she loved Henry, the certainty that her lover suffered from these sad conditions of their love as much as she did. Instead of thinking less of her, he pitied her. How many times had he begged her pardon on his knees for the faults she committed for him ? But Casal ? What did she know of his character ? Only that he had been charm-

ingly delicate, tender and respectful while he believed her to be pure.

What a change had taken place immediately the furies of jealousy had been let loose in him! How harshly he had spoken to her when she went to the Rue de Lisbonne! What sort of a man was he, and how was it she had not remembered the phrases Poyanne had uttered against him about the obvious sufferings of Pauline de Corcieux and the legend of brutal cynicism with which the name of this man of the world was coupled? She suddenly gave way to a tremor of fear, not alone caused by the fact that she feared the mysterious sides of his nature. She understood, or rather divined that in spite of her remorse, in spite of her need of self-esteem, in spite of her suddenly aroused mistrust, she would belong to this man whatever he was, if she saw him again, and he would do with her as he pleased. He had possessed her with that absolute possession which knows no forgiveness. The intensity of her sensations in his arms overwhelmed her even as a memory. It was the first time that the universe of profound pleasure had been revealed to her in its slavery of amorous intoxication which almost every woman refuses to admit yet they almost all submit to or desire it. She felt the terror of anticipation. If she succumbed a second time, it would be of her own free will. It would be too late to retract. But when he came there how could she resist him, when merely the thought of it in the distance left her so enervated, so weak, so wavering in her dream of redeeming her fault? This fault committed once only could be explained by derangement, without justifying it,

but it would be if repeated the final fall, the death of the Juliette who had known how to preserve her pride intact in a position which the world would have condemned. Formerly she absolved herself from it by personal honour. Alas! what had this honour become after her visit to Casal? What would it become if this life was only the beginning of a fresh intrigue, and a much more degrading one to her than the other. It had progressed very far in so short a time! Raymond had desired to make her his wife. He, too, in spite of his character and ideas, had dreamed the dream of which Poyanne had spoken at the beginning of his letter. He, too, had desired to live with her an open life, and give her his name. He therefore esteemed her. What could she do to prove to him that in spite of appearances, in spite of the reality of her unexpected fall she deserved, if not all this esteem, at least not the treatment of a gay woman, a class to which she had never belonged, did not, and never would belong?

Under the influence of these painful reflections during the few days, despite the forced seclusion of the wounded man gave her, a plan began to take shape in her mind which put in agreement the contradictory elements of her being; for it satisfied at the same time her need of remaining worthy of the cult which Poyanne had for her, her passionate desire to redeem as far as possible her weakness, her indestructible appetite for honour, and especially her chimera of rising in the estimation of this man Casal, whom she had not ceased to love, to a higher place, perhaps even higher than before. Suppose she were never to see

Raymond again? Should she leave Paris for ever before he could join her, and take refuge in the haven of her childhood, her dear Nançay, where after her first great misfortune in 1870, she had found solitude the magic consoler? Yes, if she went away, leaving him only the memory of a woman, who, no longer able to become his wife, did not wish to be only his mistress? He would certainly hear of Poyanne's departure for America. He would not therefore suspect her of returning to the Count after giving herself to him. He would then have to do her the justice of acknowledging that she had not been engaged with him in a vulgar love affair. But would he accept her flight? would he not follow her to her retreat? Ah well! she would go still further. Once entered upon the path of separation and definite parting in which Poyanne had set her such a courageous example, she felt that her strength would increase with the danger, and she anticipated, and this is the sublime dream of all delicate mistresses who are victims of tempests of the heart, a supreme refuge from Raymond, the shelter of a cloister. The woman who ends like this, in the austerities of a cell and in the shadow of the Cross, even the most contemptuous man cannot doubt. This entrance into the religious life would cost her so little in the broken half dead condition she was in now. Between her and the sacred refuge only Madame de Nançay stood.

"No," she thought, "I cannot because of mother." Here was a fresh obstacle which she had not considered. It would be difficult enough to make accept the idea of absolute exile, far from

Paris, her old mother, who would have to abandon all her hopes of seeing her dear child marry again! What could she say to justify this sudden resolution? What part of the truth could she admit which would decide her without breaking her heart! The fear of this talk was so great that Juliette put it off from morning to evening and from evening to morning, and she would have still further postponed it, if in the afternoon of the fourth day she had not been constrained to action by the news of Raymond's early arrival. On her return from a long walk in the deserted avenues of the Bois, where she had first of all made up her mind not to see him again, she found that a commissionaire had brought a wonderful basket of roses and orchids, to the handle of which was fastened a note the mere sight of the writing of which burnt her eyes. Although the letters were laboured as if written by a hand which found a difficulty in holding the pen she had recognized the writing, which consisted of the following few lines in pencil on a card:

"The first words I can write are to reassure my friend and ask her what time I may call on her to-morrow, on my first occasion of going out.

"R. C."

While she was reading this note which had cost the wounded man a great effort, she was breathing the voluptuous perfume of the beautiful roses. The scent enveloped her like a caress. Suddenly, as if she were struggling with a charm, she tore the paper into twenty pieces, which she threw out of the open window. Then taking away the

basket of dangerous flowers she returned to her room and fell upon her knees to pray. What took place in this distressed soul during this hour which was the hour of her life ? Is there, as the instinct of every age has supposed, in a prayer thus launched from a suffering heart to the author of our destiny, a propitiatory virtue, a chance of obtaining help for the failings of the will ? Was it at this moment, through a pact made with herself, that Juliette pronounced before her conscience the vow which less than a year later, she was to fulfil ? When she arose, a light shone in her eyes. She went straight to her mother's room, who seeing her transfigured like this was filled with astonishment—

"What have you got to tell me with such an excited manner ?" she asked. For so many days her daughter had been sad that this sudden metamorphosis frightened her.

"A resolution of which I want you to approve, dear mother, though it does not seem very reasonable," Juliette replied. "I am starting for Nançay this evening."

"That is madness," her mother replied. "You forget the doctor has you under observation, as he calls it."

"Ah ! it is a question of my health," Madame de Tillières replied ; and then she went on to say gravely, almost tragically : "Upon it depends whether you will have as a daughter an honourable woman who can kiss you without blushing, or a wretch."

"A wretch ?" Madame de Nançay repeated obviously stupefied ; and making Juliette sit down

upon the stool at her feet, she caressed her hair with infinite tenderness and went on: "Come confess to your old mother, my dear child. I am sure you have allowed some mad idea to fill your poor head. You have such a way of spoiling by your thoughts a life which might be so pleasant."

"No, mother," she said, "it is neither ideas nor thoughts." In a still more melancholy voice she went on: "I love some one whose wife I cannot be, and who is courting me. I feel, I know that if I stay here and see him again, I am lost, lost, do you hear? lost, and I have only the strength to flee."

"Why?" the mother replied with a feeling of fear which betrayed her ingenuous solicitude, "M. de Poyanne has not upset you like this? I guessed that your heart was troubled. I thought it was on his account, and that he went away because he loved you and was not free."

"Do not question me, dear mother," Juliette went on, clasping her hands; "I cannot explain or tell you anything. But if you love me, understand that I should not talk to you like this without a weight of anguish, and promise me that you will not prevent me doing what I wish to do."

"What?" the old lady cried. "Good gracious! You don't think of leaving me to enter a convent, do you?"

"No," Madame de Tillières replied, "but I want to leave Paris for ever. I should like us both to give up our rooms here, in which I will never again set foot, nor even in this city. Forgive me for leaving you to attend to details which I ought

to look after myself. I should like everything belonging to me to be sent to the château, where I will wait for you.

"You don't really mean it," the mother said. "In a month, in a year, you will be tired of being buried alive at Nançay and solitude. The sentiments which have distracted you will have departed. Then life there, without any other company than my old face, will appear and be unbearable to you."

"With you, mother, with you always there, that is my only hope of safety," the young woman repeated passionately, kissing the white wrinkled hands which were wandering over her poor face "Ah! do not argue with me. You love me and you wish me to be loyal and honourable; help me to save myself."

"With me? Always?" said Madame de Nançay sadly. "What will you become when you are alone in the world and have me no longer with you? I shall die before you, and then?"

"When I lose you," Juliette said with a look which her mother had never seen on her face before, "I shall have God."

Eleven months after his duel with Poyanne and the events which followed it, Raymond Casal was on board Lord Herbert Bohun's yacht, on his way home from Ceylon, where the two friends had been to kill elephants, after hunting lions on one of the shores of the Persian Gulf. They had called at Malta for the mail and certainly Raymond had received a letter which especially concerned him, for during the whole day he was a victim of a

sadness against which his companion did not even try to struggle. Although never a word of confidences had been exchanged between the two friends, Lord Herbert guessed that an affair of the heart weighed heavily upon Casal, who was no longer the careless comrade of old times. They had for the last eleven months spent their time almost entirely together, and in a way congenial to two comrades sailing under the flag of the Royal Yacht Squadron. They had in the month of August fished for salmon in Norway, and afterwards went as far as the North Cape. They went to England to spend a few weeks in October and November, time enough to assist at a couple of race meetings at Newmarket, and for Raymond to have a good gamble, while Lord Herbert gave way to the demon of alcohol. For at sea on board the *Dalila*, that was the yacht's name, the Englishman became quite a different person. He did not drink a drop of brandy, but overlooked every detail of the navigation of the vessel with the eye of a captain who had gained his certificate, thus demonstrating the permanency of that sense of responsibility which nothing can destroy in men of his race. These periods of sobriety without a doubt preserved him from falling under the stupefying influence of the terrible poison. His intelligence reawakened during these periods, and it was astonishing once more to recognize in him the distinguished Oxford man of the days before he sought forgetfulness in brandy. To his only friend, whom he loved with British fidelity, so deep and sure, he displayed, when he saw that he was very sad, a gay spirit which the frequenters of

Phillips' scarcely suspected in him, and a sensibility still more unexpected.

In this way, during the long voyage to Persia and India, which had lasted since December, he had humoured with infinite delicacy the sadness of his friend, and the afternoon after they left Malta, as well as at dinner and in the evening, he touched Casal so much by the discreet solicitude of his affection that at last the latter told him about the strange drama in which he had been mixed up, but without mentioning Madame de Tillières' name, after warning him that he was about to bring to his notice the most inexplicable of feminine problems. The night was one of almost supernatural beauty. The stars shone with that great brilliancy which they possess in southern skies. The *Dalila* was cleaving with unnoticeable movement the calm heaving sea, which was of a dark blue colour beneath a dark blue, almost black, sky. The freshness of the breeze, delicious as it was after the torrid heat of the Red Sea, gave to the night a charm of irresistible appeasement, and Lord Herbert, buried in a wicker chair, listened to his friend without speaking as he steadily puffed at his short briar pipe. Giving himself up to the magic of the recollection, Raymond evoked for himself more than for his quiet confidant all the scenes of his adventure, his meeting with Juliette at the house of a mutual friend, his first few visits, and the manner of his captivation by the young woman's seductiveness, the closing of her door to him and the offer of marriage into which he had been forced, then the crisis of his jealousy and his scene with Poyanne, the arrival of Madame de Tillières at the Rue de

Lisbonne and the rest. Then, after his wound had healed, he had called upon her, when he had learned of her departure. He had written to her, but without receiving any reply. He had found out her retreat at Nançay, and gone there. Not only had he not been admitted, but he had not succeeded in seeing her. He had found out that she hardly ever went out, and then only to walk in a park enclosed within walls which he had scaled like the hero of a novel. The following day she left the château for an unknown destination, having, without doubt, been warned of his presence. In the face of this persistence to avoid him, he had believed it his duty to give up a pursuit in which he would have ceased to behave as an honourable man, and then it was that he suggested to Bohun that they should start for Bergen together.

"But," he concluded, "there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that I am suffering because of a woman. What I should like, now that it is all ancient history, would be to understand it all, and I cannot do so, and perhaps it has become more difficult than ever since I received this morning among the other letters one from Candale, of which I am about to speak. Come, after all I have told you, what is your own impression of this woman?"

"Are you certain that she has never seen her first lover again?" Lord Herbert asked.

"Quite certain. He has never returned from America."

"Then she did not leave you for him. Will you allow me to ask you a rather brutal question? Was she very passionate?"

"Very passionate."

Very naïve. Do you understand me ?"

Yes, very naïve."

Had Poyanne, her first lover, seen much life in his youth ?"

"None at all. He was a sort of apostle; a clever and eloquent man; but he must have bored her very much! What is your idea ?"

"I think," Lord Herbert went on after a few minutes' silence, "that this woman always acted in good faith towards you, and loved you in a sensual way, without being able to quite cease loving the other man in her heart. He was without a doubt the lover of her mind, of her ideas, of a certain number of things in her which your influence could not destroy, and you were the lover of that which he did not satisfy in her. She required some one who was at the same time both you and him, who had some of his sentiments and some of yours, in short a Casal with the heart of a Poyanne. I see no other explanation of this strange conduct. Let us come to the letter you received this morning; what did it tell you ?"

"That her mother is dead, and she has entered a convent. She is at the Novitiate of the Dames de la Retraite," and Casal added, "It is impossible to bring into agreement facts like these; a first lover for some years, a second for two hours, and the cloister for the rest of her life."

"First of all," the Englishman said, "will she stay there ? Then if she stays there, it is just as much suicide as any other. The convent takes the place of alcohol for romantic women. It is more sentimental than whisky or morphine, and more ancient; it is also more noble, but its object is

still the same forgetfulness! But of what do you complain?" he continued with the bitterness of a man who keeps a secret spite against some old mistress he had cast off and ever since regretted. "A woman who leaves you of herself the idea that she is spending her life in asking God's pardon for loving you, is unique in our fine century of actresses and courtesans."

"For loving me?" Casal interposed, "if I were only sure of it."

"Certainly. She loved you as I told you."

"And the other man?"

"She loved him too, that is all."

"No," Casal went on, "it is impossible; there is no room in a person for two loves."

"Why not?" Lord Herbert said with a shrug of the shoulders. He lit his pipe, which he had cleaned and filled with tobacco while he was making his longest speech of the voyage. "When I was in Seville," he went on, "I had a guide who had a mania for proverbs; he used to repeat one which I am going to bring to your notice, for it contains the explanation of your story, and perhaps every other. It was: Every person is a world."

The two friends fell into a mood of silent contemplation, while the stars continued to shine bright and clear, the calm, blue sea to shimmer, and the *Dalila* to cleave her course across a sea and beneath a sky, which were less mysterious and changing, less dangerous and less magnificent than, through storms and calms, passions and sacrifices, contrasts and sufferings, that thing which it is impossible to quite understand—a woman's heart.

THE END

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.